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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["IS THAT A SNUB TO US, BECAUSE WE'VE COME?" ASKED A LAUGHING VOICE CLOSE BEHIND HER.]

A SECRET SIN.

CHAPTER X.

The ball was over. And what had it brought to Bertie Vyvyan but pain and mortification and bitterest disappointment? He had looked forward to it once as sure to bring him endless opportunities of enjoyment—a chance, at least, of hearing from the sweetest lips in the world that his love was returned, and a hope that one day, far off in the golden future, they might stand side by side before Heaven's altar and take the vows which would bind them together so that no man could part them. And all had gone like the smoke from his pipe—vanished into thin air—and he felt as miserable and woebegone as a London sweeper in the chill and the loneliness of a regular pea-soup fog!

You could rarely see a better looking face than that of the senior lieutenant of the—Lancers. The features were well-formed, and the close-cropped hair was the golden-

brown of a beech in late autumn; but it was the frank sweet smile that gave it its special charm, and the honest straightforward expression of the fearless eyes.

The most hard-hearted disbeliever in the possible virtue of men would trust Bertie Vyvyan. Even Anthony Graves, the money-lender, would turn on the screw less tightly to him than to any other of his impecunious clients. Children were never shy with him, dogs clove to him at once, and girls gave their hearts to him as a matter of course.

He had sailed down the stream of flirtation as gaily as Godfrey Valentine himself, until he met Pera Clifford; and then he pulled up, for she seemed to him so far above all the rest of her kind, that after seeing her pretty face it was absurd to pretend that he could be in love with any other.

Sitting on the sill of the window in the ante-room of the cavalry-barracks he leant his head against the wall and let his thoughts stray back to that last night at the Gate-house when they wandered about the ruins in the soft moonlight, with the silence of the night and the fragrance of roses about them,

and their two hearts beating fast with the same hope—or so it seemed.

For one long minute he had held her hand in his; he had called her by her quaint Christian name, and she had never reproved him; and for one happy hour he had thought himself loved even as he loved.

It was but a little later, when he was finishing his cigar in the old-fashioned garden, that Bernard Vansittart came to him, with a cloud as usual on his gloomy brow, and told him that he must beg him to be more careful in his manner to Miss Clifford, as she had promised to be his wife. Half maddened by the sudden disappointment, Vyvyan said that he did not believe it one bit. Hot words ensued, and the two men parted—enemies for life.

Bertie ran up-stairs, scribbled a note to Pera, snatched up the few things he had left in his room, went to the stables, saddled his own horse, and rode off, only anxious to get out of the house, and as far as possible from the girl whom he loved more distractingly than ever.

As he dashed along the silent lanes, under the moonlit sky, he raged against her in the



indignation of his outraged love; asking why she had deceived him, why had she looked into his eyes, her own shining with shy, but passionate adoration? Why had she seemed so willing to surrender to him, when she was not her own to give?

There was no answer from the honeysuckle in the fragrant hedges? No answer from the cold bright moon; and he told himself that there never would be an answer, because fickleness was as natural to a woman as fidelity to a dog.

It was hard on Bertie Vyvyan, because when he gave his trust, he gave it so entirely; when he loved, he loved with his whole heart, and as he dashed on madly, not caring a bit where he might find himself, when nature was exhausted and his chestnut pulled up of his own accord, a man watched him with a cynical smile on his thin lips.

"Going to perdition in a cursed hurry, and I'd lay any odds that it's a woman who's sent him. She might have left him alone, for he's above the average, and as simple as a child. He's the one fellow whom I feel I couldn't cheat, he'd walk into a trap with such an infernal pleasant smile on that good-looking piz of his!

"Well, I must get on, or I shall be late for the other. He's not likely to draw on my tender feelings, he's as hard as nails, but I'll show him that he's met his match. Queer place for me to be going to at this time of night. Must seem odder still to Vansittart. Perhaps he thinks that I've come to the shires for the pleasure of a chat with him," a grim smile lighting up his face, as he walked at a steady pace towards the Gatehouse.

"He knows nothing of Lucy, poor girl, how should he? and yet he passes her door every time he goes down to amuse himself with his pretty cousin. Nobody knows what's inside another man's brain. Anthony Graves, the accountant, the lender of money on exorbitant interest, the plucker of young pigeons, the hatcher of bills, and 'spoil your life' post-obits, the rooker of rooks, the 'go to the devil with your pockets full' sort of fellow. Would anyone have believed it? Could anyone have thought it—he's in love? Ha! ha! I scarcely can believe it myself, it seems the best joke out; but just let me settle with this fellow, and there'll be no joke about the rest."

A sigh not of fatigue, but of passionate longing, as he stopped at the gate and looked over his shoulder down the road to where the shades were dark under the tall elms.

"I shall be with you in half-an-hour, Lucy. There'll be no keeping me after that, and just because you are a tender-hearted little mortal, I'll be good to that wild young dog, Vyvyan, the next time we have dealings together."

Then he turned the handle of the gate and walked up the gravel road bounded by its hedge of holly, drawing his brows together as he calculated the amount of an intricate account, once more the sharp, practical man of business known to his many clients.

There was deep silence everywhere, except for the sonorous growling of the dogs in the kennels behind the old ivy-grown wall.

"D— it all, I believe the fellow's forgotten me," muttered the money-lender, angrily; but as he spoke Bernard Vansittart appeared round the corner with a cigar in his mouth, and with no outward sign on his calm exterior of the desperate excitement within him.

There was nothing to warn Graves that he had better turn and flee from this gentlemanly-looking fellow as he would from a tiger if it came upon him unprepared; no, there was nothing to warn him, and after an exchange of nods and monosyllabic greetings the two strolled off together through the small iron gate which, as we have said before, led from the private grounds to the ruins of the castle—lonely, weird, and desolate at this time of night—a place where ghosts might wander restless and unblest, a spot where crime might lurk unsuspected and unavenged. It struck one as Anthony Graves stepped on to the soft green grass, but no one heard the

clock strike when he came back, no one heard the click of the gate as he passed through it on his return.

When eager questions were asked a little later on, and only hesitating answers given, Bertie Vyvyan could throw but small light on the subject. He had passed someone on the road, and it had flashed across his mind, though it had made no impression at the time that the figure bore some resemblance to that of the well-known little money-lender.

He was too much occupied with his own feelings to find room for the thought of Anthony Graves—too much engrossed with sentimental grievances to pay any attention to the representative of hard cash. His brother-officers could not understand what had happened to him, and kept chaffing him about being down in the mouth.

He didn't see the joke; and was within an ace of growing sour and morose, but his better nature conquered, so he had the good sense to hide his troubles within his own breast, and after a time, turn a laughing face to the world.

Lady Hargreave, in an instant of ill-advised pity and compunction, had asked him to tea, and tennis at the Hall, and he was struggling between the intense desire to go, and the consciousness that it would be better to stay away.

Desire was victorious, as it generally is when only opposed by prudence.

"Better for me, but not for her. She doesn't care, and she never did. It can't do her any harm, or I'd tear myself in pieces rather than go," he soliloquised, as he emptied his pipe on the window-sill, preparatory to refilling it.

A yellow head appeared in the doorway. "If you're going to the Hall, trust yourself behind the tandem, and start at four, sharp."

A shade of annoyance crossed Vyvyan's face.

"Take Prothero, he's sure to jump at it."

"But I don't jump at Prothero. Don't be disagreeable. I'll promise to get you there as quick as anything in horse-flesh can manage it."

"If you don't land me in a ditch by the way," with a slight smile.

"If I do, I'll engage a pretty girl to pull you out, but not Miss Clifford. Look here, Bertie, old man, and Captain Valentine grew grave for a minute; 'tell me frankly, she's not your property?'"

Vyvyan bent low over his pipe, as if he had discovered a curiosity inside it.

"No, not mine," in a low voice.

"Anyone else's?" eagerly.

"I believe she is engaged to a cousin," feeling as if the words choked him.

"Oh, hang the cousin! Let him come here and look after her. What sort of fellow, eh?"

"Reserved, stuck up, with a devil of a temper."

"Hurrah! Then it's my duty to cut him out. I wouldn't have stood in your way, old fellow, and I don't say I mean anything serious—but," a smile breaking over his face.

"I mean to enjoy myself, as there seems to be no law against it."

"It's poaching, remember."

"No matter, when there's no one to take me up. Four, sharp, don't forget," and he lounged out of the room to change "his togs," as he expressed it.

CHAPTER XI.

DRESSED in a white gown, charming from its very simplicity, Pera Clifford stood under an archway of roses with one round arm outstretched to reach a bunch of blossoms above her head.

She stood on tip-toe, determined to reach them, because they were so difficult to get, saying to herself, with an impatient sigh,—

"Everything that I want to have is sure to be out of reach."

"Is that a snub to us because we've come?" asked a laughing voice close behind her.

She started, and dropped all the roses she had gathered in a heap of beauty on the path.

"Why did you creep in like a pair of burglars?" she asked, irritably, annoyed at the flush which dyed her cheeks at sight of Vyvyan looking over Valentine's shoulder.

"Your idea of creeping is not mine, Miss Clifford," said Val, as he went down on his knees to pick up the flowers. "We pulled up at the front door in the most dashing style. I wish you had seen us; we were interviewed by Lady Hargreave in the drawing-room, and we came in the most straightforward manner across the lawn in full view of a gardener and his slavey. That you should have had your back turned was an accident for which we are not responsible."

"I wonder you admit it. I thought you fancied yourself responsible for most things," talking faster than usual, and laughing nervously as she took the roses from his hand, because Vyvyan was standing gravely by, and not uttering a word.

Presently he stretched out his hand, and picked the cluster which was hanging over her head.

Val had already taken possession of a rosebud for his buttonhole, and there was a most tempting little bud on the branch which Bertie had gathered; but he put it into her hand without attempting to steal it.

"You are above such follies?" twirling the rose between her finger and thumb, and casting one shy, wistful glance up at his stern face.

The look thrilled him to the very bottom of his heart, and sent his blood dancing through his veins; but he told himself that she was only playing with him, and with a smile that was almost a sneer, he said curtly,—

"I never go in double harness," and walked off.

"He meant to say he didn't like going tandem fashion—I in front, and he behind," said Val, mischievously, looking down into the eyes which for the present were his magnet. "Are we still where we left off last night?"

"I don't know what you mean," blushing like the roses under his intent gaze, and cut to the quick by Vyvyan's manner. She scarcely knew what she was saying, but was dimly conscious of an insane desire to cry, which must be controlled at all hazards.

"I want to know if I'm first—still," the last word said softly, as if to excuse its audacity.

"You know best, as you've just come from the house."

"There was no one there who could tell me," shaking his head. "I couldn't ask Miss Haughton—Vyvyan would have been after me—besides, I'm not such a fool as to ask one girl about another."

"I thought you wanted to know if you had arrived first," looking up into his face, as he wanted her to, with bewildered eyes.

"Not quite so prosaic as that," with a smile.

"They are all coming out upon us in a troop," casting a glance over his shoulder, and seeing the rest of the guests making their way on to the lawn.

Pera's eyes went in the same direction, and she saw Vyvyan walking by Eva Haughton's side and holding her sunshade, whilst she fidgeted with the clasp of a bracelet.

The sound of her clear, metallic voice came towards them on the soft summer air,—

"I never play in it because it is so infinitely precious. Perhaps you would take care of it?" putting the bracelet into his hand. "I wouldn't ask everyone!"

"Answer me," said Val, in his softest tones, and yet with a sort of imperativeness in them.

"Just for to-day, and only to amuse ourselves, may I pretend to consider myself first favourite?"

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"Oh, just as you like. What does it matter?"
envy, hatred, and uncharitableness, raging
in her heart against Miss Haughton, and
making her quite unconscious of what she
was doing.

"It matters all the world to me," he said,
with a bow and a low, amused laugh. "Miss
Clifford, do you know you have raised me to
the seventh heaven?"

"I? I've done nothing!" she said, in
surprise. "You must have got there very
easily!"

"It only required your tiny hand to lift
me," looking down at it with full apprecia-
tion of its beauty. "Let me take your roses
into the house," taking possession of them as
he spoke, "whilst you do the polite. Mind,
you are to be my partner in every game you
play!"

She raised her eyebrows and drew up her
neck.

He looked at her in astonishment.

"You agreed to it just now! Have you
forgotten our compact already?"

"I made no compact," shaking her head,
and thinking that he was dreaming.

And then she hurried forward to greet Lady
Haughton and the others, giving the tips of
her fingers to Eva Haughton, who seemed
disposed, through perversity, to be very
friendly, whilst Captain Valentine made his
way to the house, wondering if his old friend's
charming niece were just a little bit wrong in
her head.

The long, hot afternoon drew to a close, and
how Pera hated it all from the bottommost
depth of her heart.

It seemed like a bad dream from beginning
to end, for everything went wrong. The
games were arranged by Lady Hargreave,
prompted by her usual side-decamp.

Everyone took it for granted that Valentine
—the irrepressible Lancer—would arrange
everything at Warburton Hall, for they had
been accustomed to it ever since the arrival
of his regiment in the neighbouring town.
Pera was forced to play against his will, and
revenged herself on the world in general by
playing as badly as she could; but her partner
always managed to pull her through and
himself as well, keeping his yellow head
clear, and his excitement down, as he saw
Vyvyan on the other side of the net hitting
wildly and sending ball after ball out of court,
whilst Eva Haughton's level brows drew closer
together in angry surprise.

How could Bertie Vyvyan play decently,
with Pera opposite to him, looking even pret-
tier than usual, with that soft rose-flush on
her cheeks and that dazed look in her large,
dark eyes?

He felt mad with rage and indignation,
capable of smashing his racket over Valen-
tine's unconscious and most aggravating head,
whilst he had to talk and laugh and make
abject apologies for his eccentricities and try
to preserve an appearance of sanity.

What a fool he had been—a double-dyed
idiot!

In his proud resolve to stand on his honour
and not steal a march on Bernard Vansittart
behind his back, he had only left the road
open to another—another who had no incon-
venient scruples, and who possessed the auda-
city of the Evil One himself—who would
go in and win whilst he was helplessly look-
ing on, and Vansittart was foolishly keeping
out of the way with supreme confidence in a
girl's faith and his own powers of attraction.

It was exasperating. But why should he
care? If she were never to be Mrs. Vyvyan,
why should it be better for her to be Mrs.
Vansittart than Mrs. Valentine? Only be-
cause he had an old-fashioned liking for
honour and constancy, and a breach of faith
in love he counted as dishonourable as a
breach of trust in a matter of business. Pera
Clifford would step down from the pedestal
on to which he had raised her so soon as she
showed herself fickle and changeable like so
many of her sex.

He looked at her with such a misery of

doubt in his purple eyes that she, meeting
his glance suddenly as she was in the act of
trying a volley, let the ball fly past her, and
her racket fall. Valentine sprang forward to
pick it up, looked at her curiously, and as
soon as he could said they must stop. Lady
Hargreave was signalling for them all to come
in "to muffins and teasots."

"Muffins in summer!" laughed Pera, as
she absently picked up a ball in place of a
long tan glove.

"You don't want that," taking the ball
from her hand, "but you do want this," pull-
ing the missing glove out of his pocket.

"What business had it there?" feeling
annoyed, as she saw Vyvyan watching the
small transaction with resentful eyes.

"Vyvyan pocketed Miss Haughton's bangle.
I thought pilfering was the order of the day.
May I recommend some iced champagne? I
thought you were going to faint five minutes
ago."

"No wonder! Playing in such heat is only
fit for Bedlamites."

"You are positively shaking," regarding
her with real solicitude. "Twenty times
you've tried to fasten that button, and you've
had to give it up."

"I wish you wouldn't watch me so," speak-
ing with an irritability that was unusual in
her. "Do attend to somebody else—all these
people are starving."

"Vyvyan and Prothero are looking after
them. They can manage without me, but you
can't. Sit down," placing a chair for her at
the edge of the lawn.

She obeyed because her knees were tramb-
ling so that she could hardly stand, but she
would have given anything to move away
and get rid of him. Meanwhile he brought
her champagne, which she drank with
feverish thirst, and held her plate for her, in an
unobtrusive manner whilst she ate strawberries
and cream.

He saw that she was overdone, and ascrib-
ing it to the late hours of the night before
tried to let her have a few minutes' rest,
whilst he did his best to entertain her aunt's
guests. Of course, to the rest he looked
devoted because he was holding her plate, but
she almost forgot that he wasn't an ordinary
table, and let her thoughts wander away to
someone she liked infinitely better.

Lady Hargreave made her way to Pera's
chair, and bent over it, whispering—

"I've persuaded Eva Haughton, Mr.
Vyvyan, and one or two others, to stay for
the evening. I thought you seemed to be
enjoying yourself so much it was a pity to
leave off without some dancing!"

If she had only known!

CHAPTER XII.

This torture was to go on hour after hour,
through dinner and after dinner, during an
interminable evening, and she had been buoyed
up by the thought that it must end in a few
minutes. In half-an-hour at latest she had
hoped that the carriages would be ordered, and
she and her aunt would be left in peace.

And now she would have to go on laughing
and talking, pretending to be in high spirits
and the best of tempers, when all the while
she felt as if her heart were breaking.

It had never been Pera Clifford's fate before
to have to be anything but her natural self,
and she found it hard to act a part. Wilful
and impulsive, she had always said the first
thing that came into her head, and been pre-
pared to take the consequences; but now she
had not only to take care of her words, but
even to watch over her looks lest they should
betray her secret to Bertie Vyvyan.

Sometimes she thought that if they could
have a few minutes' private conversation all
might yet be well; but how could she manage it
when it was evidently his object to avoid her?
Every now and then she told herself that no
man who cared for her the least bit in the
world could act in such a manner, and resolved
to put him out of her thoughts; and the next

moment her eyes would meet his, and she
saw in them such an involuntary and pas-
sionate appeal that all her resolutions were
upset.

She felt sure that he loved her, and if she
were to die for it she could not help loving
him in return.

But oh! the glory of her dream had gone,
and life seemed a very prosaic experience
compared with what it had been only a few
days before.

Still, she must bear it, and not let her
aunt suspect the true state of the case for the
world.

She could see that Lady Hargreave was
puzzled, and in the midst of her pain she
could not help being amused at her altered
tactics.

When Bertie Vyvyan was first brought on
the tapis he was pronounced "a detrimental,"
and kept at more than arm's length; in fact,
treated to a small dose of the woman of the
world's cold shoulder; but now that he seemed
to be devoted to Eva Haughton he was wel-
comed with hospitable kindness, and all the
doors thrown open to him.

"Of course when I wanted him he couldn't
come," Pera sighed, impatiently, "and now
that I wish him miles away he can come
whenever he likes. I'll go home to-morrow,
that I will!"

She had slipped into the garden after
dinner, whilst the ladies were engaged in an
animated discussion on the merits and de-
merits of a mutual friend, whom she knew
nothing about.

The gentlemen were still lingering over
their cigarettes as she made her way surrep-
titiously to her favourite walk, a long green,
shady alley, shaded by shrubs of many-tinted
foliage, and ended by a low moss-grown wall
of red sandstone, over which there was a fine
view of green fields, and wooded hills, and the
three spires of the Warburton churches in the
distance, throwing a thought of Heaven across
the beauty of earth. Calm, and still, and
cloudless was the evening, the silence only
broken by the murmur of a hidden stream and
the occasional bark of a dog.

There was a step behind her, and her heart
beat fast with hope; and yet a sudden shy-
ness came over her, and she would have run
away if she could have managed it undis-
covered. But she could not take the wall in
a flying leap, with a drop of ten feet on the
further side; nor could she in her best dress
dash straight through the bushes, with a
chance of tearing it to pieces. So she stood
quite still, her arms resting on the wall, her
eyes fixed upon the hills, of which she did
not even see a vestige; her heart drumming
in her ears, a soft flush stealing over her
cheeks.

Of course he had come to make it up, but
what would he say in excuse? That Bernard
had made mischief between them? or that
somehow he thought she didn't care for him?
No matter what it was, she would forgive
him with all her heart, if only he loved her
still!

"Afraid I can never make up for somebody
else," The voice was Captain Valentine's,
and her hopes went down with a run. He
was talking of "the cousin," she was think-
ing of Vyvyan, and her pride caught fire at
once. Even in her bitter disappointment she
felt the need of fighting in defence of her
self-respect.

"Perhaps you may do as well," she said,
with a little laugh.

He opened his eyes, throw his cigarette
away, and sat down on the top of the wall in
order to see her face.

"I can scarcely dare to hope it, but whilst
he's not here we might make a sort of make-
believe."

"I don't understand," her eyes still fixed
on the view, as if she were intent on discover-
ing a fourth spire.

"What is the use of being a Valentine by
name and not by unless you get some profit
out of it?"

"This isn't the fourteenth of February," gravely.

"No, but your valentine is here."

"Not mine."

"Yes, yours. We are sort of relations, you know. You are Lady Hargrave's niece, I'm almost her adopted son, so we are cousins, if nothing more, and everything throws us together. Won't you be content to forget, just for a week, that there is anyone else?" looking down into her eyes, with a laughing appeal in his own.

"Oh, certainly," shortly. "I've forgotten it long ago."

"Bravo!" his face lighting up, although some astonishment might have been noted by a quick observer, mixed with its pleasure. "Blessed be the short memory of woman!"

"We musn't stay here," she said, hurriedly, suddenly mindful of her aunt's guests.

"No, we won't stay, but we can come back," he said, softly, but with a mischievous gleam in his eyes. "We must take them in, and make them all think we are in earnest, and when the other one hears of it won't he tear his hair?"

Pera frowned. "I don't see why you should trouble your head about him."

"If you won't, I'm sure I won't." Thinking to himself, "This is the most extraordinary girl I ever came across."

"Pera, my dear child, I've been looking for you everywhere!" as they suddenly came upon Lady Hargrave on turning the corner at the end of the walk. She tried to look severe, and shook her head, but there was a smile upon her lips, for she never could be angry with her favourite niece. "Now really this is going too far."

"Not when you remember I am Miss Clifford's Valentine."

"You ridiculous boy! what are you talking of?"

"Myself. Miss Clifford's taken me on a week's trial, just to spite some one who shall be nameless."

Pera blushed crimson, and escaped into the house in order to avoid her aunt's inquiring gaze.

The two followed. The one evidently expostulating without the smallest effect, the other imperturbable and triumphant.

"She's the dearest little thing imaginable, and you musn't spoil our little game for anything. It's all fun, pure fun, so you needn't shake your dear old head."

"But this is her first season, and I can't have her chances compromised," growing uneasy at his light tone.

If he didn't mean anything serious, Pera was far too precious to be risked in an empty flirtation.

"She doesn't want any chances; and I should have thought you could trust me," looking down his nose quite huffily.

"So I can, Val," laying her hand on his arm; "but that child is very near my heart."

"All the more reason for her having half of mine," with a smile.

"Half won't do. It must be all or none."

"But she doesn't want it," raising his eyebrows.

An incredulous smile, and Lady Hargrave turned away. She did not believe there was a woman on earth who could resist "her boy."

The next minute she had seated herself at the piano, and begun one of Gung's latest waltzes. It was only an unceremonious carpet dance, with the furniture moved into another room, and but three or four couples to enjoy it.

For one blissful moment Pera thought Vyvyan was going to claim her for the first dance; but even as she thought it he turned away, and Captain Valentine slipped his arm round her waist.

"Mine, Miss Clifford," he said, with a laugh in his saucy eyes, and he whirled her away, before she had time or presence of mind to deny it.

"After all," she said, to herself, "it is no use caring for a man who doesn't even like me. Why shouldn't I enjoy myself with the best waltzer that ever lived?"

Why not? Captain Valentine was of opinion that they were enjoying themselves immensely, and every one thought the same.

Lady Hargrave looked on anxiously whenever she caught a glimpse of them; but she was not endowed with eyes in the back of her head, and as she was chained to the music-stool she could not see much besides her notes.

In a pause between the dances Pera leant against the side of the window, whilst Valentine went to find her fan. The room was for the moment deserted, the hostess having gone to refresh herself with iced coffee, and the dancers having strolled into the moonlit garden.

Suddenly Pera heard a voice behind her, but outside the window, which she recognised as Major Prothero's.

"Strange that they can't find a trace of him."

"Expect most of your fellows take a tender interest in his disappearance," said another, which sounded like Mr. Le Mesurier's.

"Don't know that," rather stiffly; "the regiment isn't bankrupt."

"No, but some of you have been going the pace. I hear Vyvyan looks down in the mouth. Queer thing: asked him when he last saw Anthony Graves, looked all in a fog."

"As if he could know anything about him," testily.

"But he did though. Jove! you'll be surprised to hear that he saw him last on the night of the third, and not a soul has seen him since."

"What of that?" coldly. "Somebody must always be the last to do a thing."

"Awkward for Vyvyan."

"Not a bit of it!" fiercely. "It might have happened to you or me."

"Only neither of us wanted him out of the way."

"Captain Valentine," said Pera, breathlessly, her face white, her eyes distended as if with horror, "what is this about Anthony Graves?"

"What do you know about him?" taking the small hand in his, which in her eagerness she had laid upon his arm.

"Only my cousin," she faltered "and—and—they are saying such things of Mr. Vyvyan."

"Such things of Vyvyan? Who dares to say a word against him?" frowning, and then his face brightened with his frankest smile. "Trust me to stand by him through thick and thin, and don't bother your little head about Graves. If he's a friend of your cousin's I'm sorry for the cousin."

(To be continued.)

TO PRESERVE BEAUTY.—Many ladies fancy that some one article helps to preserve their beauty. A society woman who preserves her freshness remarkably well, despite her many seasons' pursuit of excitement in the social whirl, attributes her good fortune to the practice of drinking a small cup of luke-warm water every day on leaving her couch. So strong is her faith in the efficacy of this remedy that its omission is sure to cause depression and languor. A lady I know has a glass of toast water placed beside her bed by her maid every morning. Another uses a half-teaspoonful of tincture of cinchona in a goblet of water; still another takes a pinch of table salt into her mouth before leaving her bed. Lots of ladies resort to such common articles as oranges and lemons and Apollinaris water, or to cool plunge baths; but the most singular freak I ever heard of was that of a Philadelphia belle, who every morning regularly gargled her throat with soap-suds made of white castile soap, which she believed was absolutely necessary to the preservation of her health.

BESSIE.

"I never will marry," said handsome Harry, As he sat on the porch one summer night; "For I never shall find a girl to my mind As clever and sweet, as gentle and bright As my mother is; and so I intend To stay with her to the very end."

"I never shall marry," said handsome Harry; Scarce spoken the words when a neighbour came; And with her a beautiful maid, who stayed Till Harry's young heart was all in a flame; With her pretty face and her winsome air, She took him a captive all unaware.

For a month or two there was such ado, And such a worry for this or that; You'd have thought that love was hid in a glove, Or modish coat, or a tie, or hat. We all of us laughed a bit at Harry, "But then," said mother, "he'll never marry."

"I am going to marry," said handsome Harry, As he sat on the porch one summer night; "And I'm not afraid, for I've found a maid, As sweet as mother, as good and bright. And it would not do such a chance to miss; Then he bent to mother and gave her a kiss."

But she shook her head. "Ah, well!" she said,

"I thought with me, to the end, you'd stay; For I very well know, but awhile ago, 'You never would marry,' I heard you say." And he answered her—" 'Tis the way with men, And I hadn't—I hadn't seen Bessie then!

"I hadn't seen Bessie! That tells it all. If I hadn't seen Bessie, I'd still be true; But I never could meet a girl more sweet, More clever and bright, or more like you. And, as I've seen Bessie," said happy Harry "As I've seen Bessie, I'm going to marry."

A. B.

BOUND NOT TO MARRY.

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CHAPTER III.—(Continued.)

THUS put upon her metal, cook demanded an extra half-hour, and at the end of that time she sent up what might have been more correctly styled a dinner than a luncheon.

Soup, fish, *entrées*, and the most wonderful creams and jellies, surprised Eleanor more than anybody else; for, when the question of what was provided occurred to her mind, she feared there would be very little to eat.

Mrs. Pritchard, however, knew better than to set two hungry men down before a small outlet, and hence her almost eloquent appeal to cook.

So the luncheon passed off pleasantly, and even Jack Hughes became more conversational before it was finished.

"You said you had something to show me," he observed to Eleanor, as they left the dining-room and went into the library, the glass doors of which opened out upon a lawn and prettily-kept flower beds.

"Yes," she answers, calmly; "I have a small collection of water colours which I thought you and your friend would like to look at. They are in this cabinet: I have not had them framed yet."

So saying, she opens the cabinet in question and takes out six small paintings, which she hands to him.

It is well that the light is not upon Mr. Hughes' face, otherwise the expression that comes over it for a moment would startle his companions; for, as he looks at the paintings, he recognises the scenes they depict, and he turns a swift, scrutinising glance upon Eleanor, of which she is happily unconscious.

"Did you do these yourself?" he asks, seeing that there is no change in her face.

"No, a dear friend of mine painted them for me," she answers at once. "They are very well done, are they not?"

"Yes, I should think they are. What is your opinion, Rowe?" he asks, appealing to his friend, who comes to his side at once, and begins to criticise.

"That colouring is too bright, and that roof is an impossible roof," says Rowe, oracularly.

"Indeed, it is by no means an impossible roof!" here interrupts Eleanor, warmly. "That is the west side of Darrel Court, it is exactly like it. The roof has that peculiar appearance, and the colouring of the trees and the sky is not untrue to nature. Haven't you seen the place look like that, Mrs. Pritchard?" she asks, appealing to her companion.

"Yes, exactly; it is really very exact," replies that lady. "But look at the picture of the waterfall, Mr. Hughes; isn't it exquisite?"

"It is very charming," he answers, in an absent kind of way. "And you really did not paint them yourself, Miss Rosevear?" he asks, pointedly.

"No, I did not," she replies, with a smile; "look at the name in the corner, if you still doubt me."

"Florry Trefusis," he reads. "I surely have seen that name before!"

"That is not very probable, unless you have been in the neighbourhood of Darrel Court," says Eleanor, coldly. "She is a nice little thing, and she paints very well for an amateur. She is the only child of a retired naval officer, and is devoted to her father, otherwise I should get her to come and live with me."

"Florry Trefusis!" repeats Hughes. "I know I have heard the name, whether I have seen the owner of it or not. I suppose these are all views of your part of the country?"

"Yes, all of them," answers Eleanor. "You can see that the neighbourhood of the Court is exceedingly picturesque!"

"It is so lovely that I almost wonder you care to leave it!" here interposes Charlie Rowe, enthusiastically.

But Eleanor shrugs her shoulders, ere she replies,—

"Yes, it is lovely; but I am always glad to get away from Darrel Court, and never anxious to go back again. I don't think I have lived in it six months out of the two years that it has been mine."

"I suppose all the Darrels have died out?" here blunders forth Charlie Rowe, with the uncomfortable feeling that she wants to tell them something about her private affairs, and does not know how to begin.

"Oh, dear no! the family is well represented!" returns Eleanor, with unconscious bitterness. "But I am not a Darrel; I don't belong in any way to them. See, what do you think of this? That bold coast-line is very grand, is it not?"

"Very!" responds Rowe; "but there is a rough, unfinished look about the work that I don't admire. I should imagine that Miss Trefusis has much more talent than patience."

"You had better tell her so; she will be here next week," says Eleanor, turning away.

She had noticed how silent was Mr. Hughes, and how earnestly he studied the pictures, looking at them, one might almost fancy, rather because he admired the scenes than took an interest in the painting.

"He is a strange man," she mentally concluded; "he seems as though he were here under protest, and as though he had made up his mind that he would not like me."

This was a novel sensation to a girl who was both a beauty and an heiress, and she half smiled at the absurdity of her own idea occurred to her.

"If he knew the Darrels, or anything about me, I might understand it," she continued to muse; "but that is most improbable."

With these thoughts in her mind she walks

on to the verandah, and seats herself in a low carpet chair, naturally expecting the others soon to follow her.

After the lapse of a few minutes, Charlie Rowe does come, and sits down near her, and begins to talk; while she, who is anxious to hear the sound of another voice, tries hard to seem to give her attention to him.

Pride will not permit her to call Mrs. Pritchard and Mr. Hughes, but, for all that, she cannot help wondering what they can find to talk about, and why they prefer remaining in the dark room to coming out on the cool verandah.

Suddenly she is conscious of another sound, and a second or two afterwards the housemaid appears, bringing a card upon a salver, and closely followed by a gentleman, whose grey hair and lined face, with a look of age upon it, are sure signs that he cannot be much under sixty.

"Mr. Merton!" exclaims Eleanor, rising; "this is an unexpected visit! Have you come from town on purpose to see me?"

The solicitor intimated that he had done so, and a slight look of alarm came over the young lady's face; but it quickly disappeared, and she introduced the two gentlemen, offered the last comer a seat, and remarked,—

"You are not in any particular hurry to return to town, I suppose? Shall you go back to-night?"

"Yes, I shall take the last train, which leaves about eight o'clock," he replies; "until then, I am at your service."

She bows; and Rowe, who begins to feel himself in the way, makes some vague remark about wondering what has become of Hughes, then steps back into the room, where he had left his friend.

"Who is that young man?" asks Mr. Merton, as soon as Rowe has disappeared.

His question implies a certain equality with his client, for he is one of her trustees, as well as her solicitor; and as she has no legal guardian, he considers it his business to look after her interests.

She is about to explain, when Rowe returns, followed closely by Mrs. Pritchard, and says,—

"I find that Hughes has gone, and I must be going also. Shall I have the pleasure of calling upon you to-morrow?"

"Yes, about ten o'clock, if you have no other engagement," she replies, politely. "But why has Mr. Hughes gone without speaking to me?" she asks, in pained surprise.

"He suddenly remembered an engagement," volunteers Mrs. Pritchard, "and as Mr. Merton had just come in, he asked me to say good-bye to you."

Eleanor bowed gravely. She was greatly annoyed, though she strove to hide it, and she mentally resolved that she would never try to bring Jack Hughes to her house again.

She tried to hide her vexation, shook hands with Mr. Rowe, and then sat down to talk to the lawyer, whose business, she knew, must be important.

But Mr. Merton was in no hurry to begin the matter that brought him from town, and he asked, with what Eleanor considered unnecessary curiosity,—

"Was that Mr. Hughes who was in the library with Mrs. Pritchard as I passed through it?"

"Yes, I suppose he was there," replied Eleanor, coldly.

Her annoyance is still too great for her to care to talk about the man who has done her so great a service, but who has likewise treated her with the barest courtesy.

The lawyer's curiosity is excited, however, and he remarks, with a set purpose,—

"I believe I have seen him before; who is he?"

"I don't know any more than you do!" replies Eleanor, with unusual impatience. "He saved my life, and I have tried to be civil to him, but not with any great success."

The lawyer opens his eyes. He finds the subject far too interesting to be set aside, as Eleanor desires, and he begins to ask so many questions, that she, almost irritated by his persistence, refers him to her companion for details.

Mrs. Pritchard is by no means unwilling to describe Eleanor's narrow escape from death, in the most dramatic language at her command, her own anxiety being well remembered in the narrative.

And when she has finished Mr. Merton makes the curious remark,—

"I wonder if he knew before he went into the water who it was he was going to save?"

"Yes, I believe he did," replies the companion, with a contraction of the brows, "for I heard by accident that these two artists had been inquiring who we were when they first saw us at the hotel at Harwich."

The lawyer gave his shoulders a shrug, an easy way of expressing or avoiding the expression of a good many sentiments; and after inquiring if the two artists were staying in Dovercourt he allowed the subject to drop, and began to talk of the business which brought him from town.

"I have received notice that Hugh Darrel is going to dispute your right to Darrel Court, and the adjoining estate," remarks Mr. Merton, gravely, "and I came down to talk the matter over with you and consult with you as to the steps we must take to defend the case."

"I don't mean to defend it!" says Eleanor, her eyes flashing angrily; "although the Darrels have been none too civil to me since Miss Darrel died. They have refused to see me, refused to answer my letters, and have stigmatised me as an adventuress. After such conduct they cannot expect any concession at my hands; but, at the same time, I don't want to fight them."

The lawyer takes a malicious pleasure in seeing Eleanor excited, and he now replies, in an intensely provoking tone,—

"They don't ask for any concession; they won't accept any; they say they ask only for justice. They admit the late Miss Darrel's right to dispose of her private fortune, but they dispute her power to appoint any but the direct heir to the estate. Between ourselves, I believe that my late client held the same opinion, but she was very anxious that Hugh Darrel should marry you, and that was why she made such an arbitrary will. If you marry anybody else, all you now enjoy will go to Hugh Darrel; but if you marry him, though it would become his, you would still share it."

"Share it with him!" echoes Eleanor, passionately; "I would die first! I never saw him, I don't know what he is like; but I would not marry him to save myself from beggary!"

"Still, it's a misfortune that he hasn't asked you," replies Mr. Merton, quietly; "for had he done so, we might have come to something like terms."

But Eleanor only hears the first part of the sentence.

She believes that it has only been uttered to taunt her, and, with haughty mien and flashing eyes, she rises from her seat and walks out of the room.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. MERTON MEETS A "QUEER FISH."

ELEANOR has calmed down considerably by the time Mr. Merton again sees her.

Naturally, she is sweet-tempered and yielding, but there are things that will rouse the most gentle of women, and our fair heroine has in her time had more than enough to try her.

She has never known the love of parents. Her father and mother both died while she was quite an infant, and from her earliest recollection she has had no friend or protectress but Miss Darrel of Darrel Court, a singular

old lady, who, having loved her mother, adopted the helpless child, and brought her up to womanhood with infinite care and tenderness, but with as little judgment as though she had been a Persian cat or a pet poodle.

By the adoption of this child, coupled by her many peculiarities, Miss Darrel had succeeded in completely estranging her family; and when, about a year before her death she wrote to her nephew, Hugh Darrel, her direct heir, inviting him to come and spend a week at Darrel Court, that young man's mother wrote to say that her son was then on the Continent, but he would be, no doubt, glad to accept his aunt's invitation if that young person, Eleanor Rosevear, were not in the house.

The writer of this autocratic letter went on to observe,—

"I have heard from several quarters that you have expressed your intention of marrying your *protégée*, Eleanor Rosevear, to my son; and I therefore wish you to understand, once and for ever, that such a union never will, and never shall, take place. On this subject I am pleased to say my son is of the same opinion as myself; and, therefore, though there could be no danger of his falling in love with the girl whom you have taken into your house as an equal, the young person herself might not be so safe; consequently, for her sake, as well as our own, it is my wish that they should not meet."

Fortunately for Eleanor's comfort, she knew nothing of this letter until after Miss Darrel's death, when it was found among the old lady's papers, and was considered by some persons to be a justification to her own mind for her singular will.

Had Hugh Darrel himself been in England and been the first to read his aunt's letter, the chances are that he would have paid no heed to Eleanor's possible danger from his presence, but would gladly have seized the opportunity of paying a visit to the home of his ancestors—the home which must, according to the teaching of his youth, one day belong to him.

But the whole family seemed to forget that Darrel Court and estate were not entailed, for had they been Miss Darrel could not have held them, and her right to them there was none to dispute.

It was, therefore, a crushing blow, which fell more heavily upon Hugh's mother than upon the young man himself, when it came to their knowledge that Miss Darrel had died suddenly, having, a year previously, directly after the receipt of Mrs. Darrel's letter, made a will, by which she left all the property of which she died possessed, including Darrel Court and estate, to Eleanor Rosevear for her absolute use for life, or until such time as she should marry.

This to Eleanor was the cruel part of it; there was no provision whatever for her if she did marry.

Hugh Darrel was disappointed, for though all his aunt's possessions were ultimately to come to him, the chances were that Eleanor would outlive him; but his mother was simply furious—and, despite his advice and entreaty, she would persist in going to Darrel Court to tell Eleanor Rosevear what she thought of her.

Fortunately for the comfort of both ladies, Mr. Merton was at Darrel Court when Mrs. Darrel unexpectedly arrived. Observing the frame of mind she was in, he refused to allow her to see Eleanor; and she, with fine impartiality, poured forth all the vials of her wrath upon him.

The exercise of her tongue, and the forcible language she employed may have done her some good. It certainly did Mr. Merton no harm; and when she went away the atmosphere seemed clearer, for it was evident to the lawyer's mind that such a storm in a tea-cup would not have been allowed to rage if there had been any serious intention of trying to upset the will.

Matters had gone on very peaceably since then; a widow lady, still comparatively young, had been found to share the girl's home and to travel with her, and no event of any importance had occurred until the time when we first met Eleanor at Harwich.

By this time she had become accustomed to her position, and to all the drawbacks which came in its train.

The most mortifying condition connected with her wealth was the stipulation which bound her not to marry.

Not that she had any desire to marry, or had even met a man to whom she would care to entrust her happiness; still the restriction galled her, while the discovery that when she married she would lose all her wealth had hitherto had the effect of driving the majority of her admirers away.

But to return to the present, and to the consequences of Mr. Merton's last conversation with our heroine.

"I have been thinking the matter over," she says, when they have finished dinner; "and I have come to the conclusion that it is very desirable that the question should be answered satisfactorily as to whether Miss Darrel had, or had not, the power to leave her estate to me. If she had not, the sooner it goes to the rightful owner the better; but if she had the power, and it is mine, it is well to know it, and to be satisfied; for as I shall never marry I should like to feel secure as to my position."

"Then what do you wish to do?" asks the lawyer, who is a little taken aback by her calmness and impartiality.

"I wish the matter to be investigated, defended if you like, but in a friendly spirit. You smile; is that impossible?"

"I am afraid so," he replies. "A friendly fight means friendliness on both sides; and if, when they have smitten us on one cheek we turn the other also, our adversaries are apt to misunderstand our motives."

"Well, I must leave the manner of the fight to you, Mr. Merton?" replies Eleanor, with a smile; "all I want is justice. I suppose they will say the same, and if we both get it we shall be satisfied."

"I am afraid there won't be much satisfaction in the whole business," answers Mr. Merton; "unless—"

Then he stops short. He has been thinking aloud an imprudent habit for any one to indulge in—and almost culpable in a lawyer.

"Unless—" repeats Eleanor. "What is the contingency of which you were thinking?"

"Nothing—nothing. A fancy of mine—nothing more. By the way, I should think those young artists are worth cultivating; particularly the one that saved your life."

"I don't agree with you," retorts Eleanor, the colour rising to her cheeks. "If he had not done me so great a service I would not speak to him again, for he is almost rude. The idea of his going out of the house to-day without saying a word to me!"

"Wanted to catch a train, didn't he?" asks the lawyer, with a laugh that almost ends in a chuckle; "or perhaps he didn't like the look of me. It's a peculiar thing, but some people don't like to meet me."

"Oh! he didn't run away because of your arrival," says Eleanor, loftily; "he is a very peculiar, proud young man, and I cannot say that I altogether like him."

"I like him very much!" here interposes Mrs. Pritchard. She has been hitherto silent. "At first I thought him very proud and stand off," she continues. "Don't you remember my telling you that there was an air of *le grand seigneur* about him, my dear?"

"I think you did once say something of the kind," yawns Eleanor, not displeased to hear Jack Hughes praised, though she herself speaks of him slightly.

"Well, there is that about him," the companion goes on to say; "but the unpleasant feeling soon wears off; and he is very charming, a perfect gentleman, with something sensible to say on every subject."

"What a paragon!" retorts Eleanor, with a laugh, "and how clever you must be to discover all these fine qualities in a man whom you have only known for a few days. I am afraid if he had not pulled me out of the water you would never have found out his fine points."

"I don't think that act of his should be scored against him," observes the lawyer, "and I should imagine from the little I hear that he cannot be looked upon as a fortune-hunter."

Eleanor turns away, for the careless remark galls her.

Is she always to be sought for the fortune that, matrimonially, is nothing better than a delusion and a snare?

Cannot even Mr. Merton, who has known her from childhood, imagine it possible for some man to love her for herself, and not for the glittering gold, which she must renounce if she becomes a wife!

She is woman enough to feel hurt, and bitterly humiliated by her false position, and her heart aches when she thinks of the desolation of her lot.

No father or mother to love and shield and be proud of her. No sister nor brother; no near relatives whatever. Here she is alone, hedged round by the conditions of that capricious will, and placed in such a false position that even those who know her best, regard every possible admirer as one seeking for her fortune instead of for her heart.

Surely this is enough to crush down her proud spirit, and to make her feel of less real account in the world than the humblest of her own domestics?

They have their relations, and friends, and admirers, who look for no wealth, knowing full well that they will get none, but who are quite content if they may win the girl they love.

The cruelty of her fate seems for a moment more than Eleanor can bear, and having turned away from her companions she wrings her hands in silence.

But this is no new thing that has come over her.

She has had this heart-hunger in a greater or less degree all her life, and with that despairing grip of her own hands she crushes back the feeling, for the time at least, and turns to the lawyer with a subdued expression of countenance that is almost sad.

"I intend to stay here a month—or possibly longer," she says, quietly; "then I shall go to Darrel Court, but whether I shall spend the winter there or in London is more than I can at present say."

"Why not spend the winter in Paris, or Berlin, or Vienna?" he asks. "It would be much more cheerful for you, and I would make it my business to get you some good introductions."

"It is very kind of you," she replies, with a shadowy smile, "but I prefer my own country to any other under the sun. There is no comfort in winter, to my mind, like that to be found in a well-to-do English home."

"Probably you are right," assents Mr. Merton. "I confess to having a weakness for my own fireside, but I must be off, or I shall lose my train."

Ten minutes after this he is out of the house, but when Eleanor, after having said "good-bye," glances at the clock, she sees that it still wants half-an-hour to the time at which Mr. Merton said his train would start.

"I suppose he made a mistake," she remarks to Mrs. Pritchard; "but a man can always take care of himself."

"Or perhaps a sudden fancy came into his head to walk down by the sea," returns the companion, quietly. "Men are uncertain creatures at all times. Yes, my surmise is correct; there he is, walking towards the shore as fast as he can go."

But Eleanor is not interested in the movements of the lawyer, and she turns away from the window drearily.

She is weary and sad.

The solitude of her lot presses upon her to-night, and she bitterly quotes Aurora Leigh, and wonders why women who have none to love them are still compelled to bear the burden of life.

"Oh! why did he save me?" she moans. "Why did he save me? I had passed through the bitterness of death, I should have felt no more pain, and as for not wishing to pass that bourne from whence no traveller returns, of which Hamlet speaks, I must pass it sooner or later, and it was hard to be dragged back from the very portals of that world of which we dream so much and know so little. Why did he save me?"

Oddly enough Mr. Merton was repeating very much the same question to himself, though in another form, as he walked as fast as his more than middle-aged limbs would permit, after a tall, broad-shouldered man, who, dressed in a velvet coat and broad-brimmed, soft felt hat, had some short time previously disappeared down one of the gradually sloping paths that lead to the esplanade and shore.

"I'll run him down if I lose my train, and have to stay at an hotel for the night," determines the lawyer, as he hurries on till he comes to the edge of the high ground upon which Dovercourt is built.

Here he stands for a few minutes, looking eagerly for the object of his search over the grassy terraces, on some of the seats of which loiterers are smoking, and lovers are talking after the manner of the frequenters of seaside places of the kind.

The tide is in, and the sun is going down in a red blaze of splendour, and the shades of evening are following close upon the footsteps of the departing god of day.

Mr. Merton is puzzled.

The man whom he had seen come this way could not have gone far, neither could he have returned without being observed, and it was some few minutes before he recognised the velvet coat as being on a man who had taken off his ugly head-covering and was leaning against the wall which divides the rocks from the gravel path on one side of the hill.

He was looking out to sea, watching the sunset, while the waves plashed up against the wall upon which he was leaning.

The lawyer paused to regain his breath, then he walked slowly and with seeming carelessness down the sloping pathway until he came to the side of the wearer of the velvet coat, when he, too, paused, and leaning against the wall within half-a-yard of the other seemed as though he were standing here to enjoy the beauty of the clouds and their reflection upon the sea.

"Very fine, 'pon my word, very fine!" Mr. Merton remarks, in a patronising tone, as though the glorious mingling of light and colour were some spectacular drama being played for his amusement.

Jack Hughes, for it was he whom the lawyer had followed, slowly turned his head, while a look of amused contempt came into his eyes, but in a moment his face changed and flashed angrily, while the lawyer, with a momentary flash of triumph, but in the most suave and courteous tones, said,—

"Ah, I thought I could not be mistaken, my dear sir; and it was you who saved my fair client's life! That was nobly generous of you, and I think—"

"Whatever you think, sir, you had better keep to yourself," returned Hughes, brusquely. "What I do I do from motives that concern myself, and myself only. Good evening."

"Pray, my dear sir, do not think that I have addressed you from any unworthy motives, but I felt sure I had seen you before, and when I did recognise you a few seconds ago I thought it only fair that you should know it," the lawyer hastens to say.

Mr. Hughes bows. He knows very little of Mr. Merton, and that little is not altogether in his favour; and he is at present too in-

different on the subject to be really annoyed at the encounter, but he will ask no question and will enter into no conversation, so that the lawyer finds it a little difficult to say,—

"I shall not make a remark to anyone about having met you. Good evening, sir."

Whereupon Hughes again bows, and the two men part.

What was the meaning of the lawyer's words, and why Mr. Hughes should feel annoyed at the meeting, there was no one by to say, and if questioned both of them would have been sternly silent.

That there was some secret which the lawyer had discovered, though he may not dare to use it, there can be no doubt; and as he hastens to the railway station, which he reaches just in time to catch the train for London, he mutters to himself, with a curious mixture of amusement and anger,—

"Well, he is the queerest fish that ever I heard of."

And there can be no doubt, that of queer fish, Mr. Merton had had a wide and varied experience.

CHAPTER V.

FLORRY THURSTON.

THOUGH the rain is falling in a perfect deluge the next morning Charlie Rowe presents himself at the White House punctually at ten o'clock.

Rather to his surprise he finds Miss Rosevear ready for him, with a miscellaneous collection of brushes, paints, sketches, and paintings in various stages of completion collected in the room where she is sitting.

She rises and greets him courteously, but without any effusion, and though she does not know him well she sees, or fancies she sees, that he has been considerably vexed and put out this morning.

Directly he finds himself in her presence he brightens up, and the look of annoyance leaves his face.

Nor is he to be blamed for this, nor for thinking that Eleanor is this morning looking supremely beautiful.

Yet her dress is as simple as dress can be. A gown of navy blue serge, a plain linen collar, and a knot of pale blue ribbon complete a *tout ensemble* which makes the young artist mutter to himself indignantly,—

"And Hughes said she wasn't fit to be a poor man's wife! Much he knows about her. She is just one of the women whom fine clothes spoil!"

Perhaps Eleanor would object to this conclusion if it were communicated to her, because there are few women who believe that they can be spoiled by fine clothes; but Charlie Rowe is far too prudent to betray his thoughts to his fair pupil, and he looks over the work she shows him critically, makes some remarks that are certainly not complimentary, and points out various faults which she must learn to avoid.

"These are mostly copies," he says, slightly, "and copies from bad subjects; we must do most of our work in the open air. You must draw from Nature, not from the works of those who libel her, but you will have to work very hard to achieve anything like success."

"But I do not propose to adopt art as a profession, Mr. Rowe," expostulates Eleanor, with a smile. "I don't think it would be fair to others even if I had the talent or inclination to do so, and I have neither."

"Is it not a desirable thing to cultivate a talent that will enable you to defy the caprices of fortune?" asks Rowe, with his light blue eyes gleaming eagerly.

"It might be desirable for some people, but it is not so for me," she replies, with painful dejection. "Dame Fortune has done all that is in her power to spite me; besides, jesting aside, Mr. Rowe, I do not possess the genius which alone can make a great artist, and I know it."

She looks at him in such a straightforward, fearless manner that he feels slightly abashed, and answers, with less assurance,—

"No, I don't say that you have genius, but you have sufficient talent to do some good work, for which you could command a fair price."

"My ambition does not lie in that direction," she says, with a suppressed yawn, "and the market is already overstocked with what you call fairly good work, better than I could ever paint; and you know that it is so."

Charlie is silent, for he cannot always sell his own work at a price that he thinks it is worth.

"We shall not be able to go out painting to-day," he says, at length, looking out of the window gloomily. "I hate a wet day," he continues, with a shiver; "it isn't only that I can't work, but it takes the life and soul out of me."

"Oh! I rather like a wet day for a change," remarks Eleanor, with a smile, "and we shall have plenty of opportunities for out-of-door work when Miss Trefusis comes. I expect her on Monday, and you and she can go on with your own painting and give me occasional hints. I know I must not take up too much of your valuable time."

"My time isn't of much use to myself or anybody else on such a day as this," he replies, moodily, "but when the sun shines I do work in earnest."

"I have no doubt of it," responds the young lady kindly. "You must show me some of your work before we go away."

She would like to ask a question, but while she is meditating how to frame it, Mrs. Pritchard saves her the trouble by saying in a tone which sounds like an assertion,—

"Your friend, Mr. Hughes, paints very well, doesn't he?"

"Yes, he is an uncommonly clever fellow," responds Rowe, generously. "He does most things well; it's a pity he is so crotchety. He went off quite unexpectedly this morning, and it's impossible to say when he will come back again. The probability is that he won't turn up at all."

Eleanor makes no comment, but her lips become dry, and she rises from her seat and walks over to the window.

"Gone away!" repeats Mrs. Pritchard, with genuine interest; "where has he gone?"

"He has gone to Ipswich to-day," replies Rowe in an aggrieved tone, "but he has given me an address in London to which I can write if I've anything to write about. It's rather shabby of him to leave me in the lurch in this manner," he continues, "for I should never have come here if it had not been for him. I wanted to take a pedestrian tour in Cornwall, but he talked me out of it; and now I have come here to please him he has left me to shift for myself."

"I should never have thought that Mr. Hughes would have done anything shabby," exclaims Mrs. Pritchard, in genuine surprise.

Her meaning is so obvious that Charlie feels that he has been misunderstood, and he hastens to say,—

"I don't mean shabby in money-matters. Hughes would never be that. It is his making me give up my own plans and then leaving me without carrying out the ones we had formed together that I am grumbling about."

"I suppose he had some good reason for going away so suddenly," remarks the elder of the two ladies, curiously.

"If he had, he kept it to himself," replies Rowe; "indeed, he said something about coming back again, but he took away all his belongings, which doesn't much look like an intention to return."

Eleanor turns from the window as he says this, and asks, in a polite, careless way,—

"Does Mr. Hughes often do this kind of thing?"

"I never knew him do it before. He is an uncommonly good fellow, and the most thoroughly reliable man I ever met; but no doubt he had some good reason for going off

as he did this morning, and I am a selfish fellow to grumble."

And as he says this Charlie Rowe smiles with such an honest, self-reproachful smile that both of the ladies feel a desire to comfort him, and when, as a kind of afterthought, he adds,—

"Besides, I can never be grateful enough to him for making me acquainted with you," Eleanor says impulsively,—

"The gratitude should be on our side Mr. Rowe, and you must let us be as kind to you as we can."

She has no special meaning in her words beyond a desire to be kind to him, for the sake of the friend to whose efforts on her behalf she owes her life; and Mrs. Pritchard partly guesses as much, and smiles a little sadly, as she sees how the young man takes the sentiment that is intended to convey so little, but that can be magnified to imply so much.

"And now as the rain won't stop, and you can't paint, suppose you play us something?" continues Eleanor. "There is some new music that came yesterday. I have not tried any of it over yet."

And then they play and sing until luncheon is announced.

They leave their sheets of music about, saying they will come back to it, but before luncheon is quite over there is a prolonged knock at the front door, speedily followed by voices in the hall, and a few seconds afterwards a servant comes and says,—

"Miss Trefusis has come, miss, and has brought some boxes."

"Yes; I expected her next week," replies Eleanor, rising; "get the best spare room ready. Excuse me," she adds, turning to those at table, then she goes out to greet her friend.

There is a confused sound of voices outside the door, one of the speakers talking volubly, without pause or punctuation of any kind, until her supply of breath fails her; then Eleanor's modulated voice has a chance of being heard, and a few minutes afterwards the dining-room door opens and the heiress and her guest enter.

Miss Trefusis gushes over Mrs. Pritchard, whom she knows, then bows very low to Mr. Rowe, whom she supposes that she meets for the first time.

He responds, but he has seen Miss Trefusis elsewhere, though her name was then unknown to him, and she becomes uneasily conscious of the fact before many minutes have elapsed.

She says nothing about it now, however, and though she poses as a child of nature, she is not without a very fair share of prudence, not to say cunning.

"I am very hungry, very," she says, eating as though she had not broken her fast for the day.

But she manages to talk even while she eats, and from what she says Mr. Rowe gathers that she has come from London this morning.

As soon as he can do so, without seeming abrupt, he takes his leave, feeling sure that, for the present at least, he is no longer wanted.

(To be continued.)

For every life there is a summit. Happy are they who gain it, and sad the lot of those who faint and fall in the struggle. Short or long to the top, it can only be scaled by persistent climbing. There must be ambition to do and dare or the prize will not be secured.

EVERY man has a paradise around him till he sins and the angel of an accusing conscience drives him from his Eden. And even then there are holy hours when this angel sleeps, and man comes back, and, with the innocent eyes of a child looks into his lost paradise again—through the broad gates, at the rural solitudes of nature.

THE VOICES OF NATURE.

"Who calls me silent? I have many tones—
The dark skies thrill with low, mysterious moans,
Borne on my sleeping wings.
I waft them not alone
From the deep organ of the forest shades,
Of buried stream, unheard amidst their glades."

Yet 'tis not the fierce northerly, nor the wild west wind, that can so thrill our hearts. They may awe and even terrify us with forebodings of danger and destruction, but the more subtle power is given to those low, weird sounds, whose chords, all played to us in a minor key, speak to us of human passions hushed and tired hearts stilled.

We may hear these lone murmurings in the forest when not a leaf is stirred, yet, like the voices in Ossian, very far away they sound. We may hear them on the moorland when no object, save the wild bird soaring upward to the skies, is visible.

And read Faber's description of the desert. It also has its quietness and unrest.

"It is a desolate spot! It is the dead of night, but the wilderness has many voices, sad, moaning, and inarticulate. Is it the wind grating on the sand? Is it the sobbing of the ready springs, taken up by the quiet night from a thousand places and breathed through a tube of darkness as if it were one murmuring note? Is it the clefts of the rocks that make organs for the wind? Or is it the very earth around us, sleeping uneasily and dreaming of its own desolate sterility?"

There are, too, the dash of the waves upon some storm-swept shore, the mighty roar of Niagara, but these are not the voices we would love to hear—they are too palpable in their sublimity, speaking equally to the eye as to the ear. Rather would we listen to the more imaginative and softer cadence

"Of neighbouring fountain, or of rills that slip
Through the cleft rock, and chiming as they fall
Upon loose pebbles, lose themselves at length
In matted grass, that with a livelier green
Betrays the secret of their silent course."

We do not believe that great stupidity is a common natural gift. Doubtless it sometimes is so; but as seen among grown-up people, it is often artificial. The bad teacher complains of the pupil. There is a well-known instance of a girl who, at fifteen, was thought so stupid that her father despairingly abandoned the attempt to educate her. The girl was Elizabeth Carter, who lived to be, perhaps, the most learned woman that England ever produced.

A FRIGHTENED ELEPHANT.—A writer who relates the experience of three men who were on a tiger-hunting expedition gives the following:—To prevent the invasion of mosquitos and other insects which would be attracted by the light, the heavy cotton curtain which formed the door of the tent was closed, and the three friends were chatting across the table, when suddenly the whole tent shook; and as they looked round to see the cause, the heavy curtain was snatched away, and in the open doorway appeared the head of a gigantic elephant. The men had no time to catch up their rifles. They knew by the appearance of the animal that he meant mischief. Lifting up the roof of the tent with his head, he threateningly swung out his trunk at the doctor. Babcock sprang to his feet, and seizing the lighted lamp, hurled it with all his strength against the animal's forehead. The glass broke at the blow, and the blazing oil covered the animal's trunk with a sheet of flame. With a cry of terror the beast drew frantically back, shook off the curtain, and fled across the country at the top of his speed—vanquished by a single blow from a small paraffine lamp. It was a very fortunate act, for the animal was no doubt a "rogue" elephant, and he would probably have killed one or more of the men.

HUNGARIAN VERSUS GERMAN.

The composite and heterogeneous nature of the Hapsburg Empire is fully realised by the traveller on taking his first walk in Buda-Pesth. Everywhere, nowadays, the German language is rigorously excluded from public inscriptions, whether on street corners or tramcars, or steam-ferry piers; and this though the king, Francis Joseph, is himself a German, and Germans by thousands are in the city.

In this the Hungarians are taking full revenge for the impolitic attempt to crush their nationality in the past, and, as all Hungarian children are now taught their own language, in the first instance, at elementary schools, and German rather as an accomplishment, no inconvenience, we presume, is felt by the majority of the population at this jealous exclusion of the hated "schwab," as the German language is termed by them.

The Englishman, however, with his smattering of German, picked up at schools or elsewhere, must needs regret that the two languages are not used in public places, as French and Flemish are in Brussels, and German Czech at Prague.

It would be of no consequence in his eyes which language stood first, so that he might get the German somehow. Possibly that tongue will again appear in Buda-Pesth for the benefit of the many who cannot master Magyar articulations, when the soreness which has sprung from past tyranny has had time to subside.

To take one instance of the trouble caused by the exclusion of the German tongue; Baedeker speaks of the Stadtwelchen, obviously, as any educated Englishman sees, some kind of park, but when the foreigner searches for the name on the tram-car he cannot find it.

Varos Liget, though he knows it not, is the name he wants. There would, of course, be nothing strange in all this were Hungary in every way a separate state, but it shows an unaccommodating spirit towards other subjects in the same Empire, who are as helpless in the matter of the language, very often, as the Englishman himself.

HOW NATURAL GAS IS PRODUCED.—At present fact and inference combined seem to show here the existence of active agencies producing the gas in constant operation. Beneath our feet is a great arch of fractured rock, through innumerable crevices in which everywhere along its crest this invisible substance is constantly escaping into the open air. Wherever water covers the surface along the line of fracture the gas is seen bubbling up through it. Investigation has shown us that there are no depths in the rocky crust of the earth so profound that water from the surface has not reached them; and it has been demonstrated that water in contact with red-hot carbon will produce the identical gas which forms nine parts out of ten of that which flows now from our wells, or that reaches the air through natural crevices. The other tenth, on the premises assumed, could very readily be accounted for. Note, in this connection, that no physical fact is more clearly substantiated than that the internal heat of the earth increases one degree Fahrenheit for every forty-five or fifty feet in depth that we penetrate into its crust. What does that mean? Penetrate into it a mile and a-half and you get boiling water. Dig or drill down into it, if it were possible, seven or eight miles and you reach a point at which the carbon of the lower rocks is bathed in the glow of a furnace. Through various channels the fissures extending down under the synclinals and by absorption and transmission through porous rocks at their outcrops, water finds its way down these. The plan of structure of the great trough itself within which all the materials are inclosed, seems designed expressly for the effects that we see produced, and no condition that we know of, essential to the constant formation of the gas, fails to be supplied.

IVA'S QUEST.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NOTHING came of that strange discovery in Marrables' bedroom.

When Dr. Sturgis and Iva discussed the value of these proofs against the waiting-maid the elder man shook his head.

"If you take my advice, Mr. Ducie, you will take no notice whatever of what you have seen to-day."

"No notice? Why, doctor, surely you see this brings the guilt home to Marrables? Unless she had an active hand in my darling's disappearance would she have her clothes and her very hair?"

"The hair is in your keeping now," said the doctor, with a sad smile. "Iva, don't you see we have no proof of what we allege? A blue serge dress might belong to anyone. Marrables is quite an artist in hair-dressing. She might declare these tresses were trusted to her to manufacture into plaits."

"But no one would believe her."

"Even there you fail in your real quest. Bring the crime home to Marrables if you will; how will that affect my lady? Depend upon it, Iva, it would only be a spur to her to finish her work!"

Iva shuddered.

"Then, after all my pride in the discovery, it is worthless?"

"Not worthless; it proves beyond a doubt that Marrables and my lady know the secret of Gerda's fate. Now, why were those clothes brought here? Both those women are too clever to do anything without an object. What was their motive for bringing such things from their hiding-place to this crowded house, where discovery was almost certain?"

"We must wait and see."

They had not long to wait. The day after Iva settled in Lime Cottage the whole village was roused by the news that the mystery of Miss Ducie's fate was solved at last.

She had gone away, thinking independence would be pleasant work; she had come back lonely, despairing, wretched—come home to die!

The tale was on everyone's lips. The soft, silvery waters of the lake in Sir James Pierrepont's grounds, they said, held the secret.

Her clothes were found neatly folded on the banks. The blue serge dress she had worn so constantly, the tight-fitting black jacket, and small straw hat—these told their own story, these explained the mystery, and told its end—a suicide's death!

Dr. Sturgis was prompt in calling at Lime Cottage. He took the little house first in his morning rounds.

Nurse Brown herself opened the door, and ushered him into Iva's presence.

She had heard all there was to tell, and knew Marrables' character as well as her master.

Her old eyes shone with indignation as she fixed them on the doctor.

"You don't believe it, sir? You'd never turn so cruel to my poor child as to think she took her own life?"

"I know it is a trumped-up story," said Dr. Sturgis, kindly. "Mr. Ducie, I understand now why that bundle was brought to my house."

Iva looked thoughtful.

"If only Lady Ducie had used her common sense she must have known that a woman bent on suicide would not take off her warm dress and jacket before plunging into the water. A very poor, desolate creature, who had often faced hunger and want, might have been influenced by a desire to save the clothes, but Gerda was not old enough in hardship for that. No; for once my lady has overreached herself. No one will believe the absurd story."

But he was wrong; many people *did* believe

it. All the matrons who were Lady Ducie's friends and admirers took up the idea hastily. The news even travelled to Torquay, and Sir James wrote a pitying letter of condolence to Iva. The young man folded it carefully away.

"Will they never tire of trying to rob me of my hope? Hope can harm none of them. Why won't they let me keep it?"

But the days passed on, and Iva grew no nearer. He dwelt at Lady Ducie's gates; he could see whoever passed in or came out; but not the slightest clue came to the mystery which puzzled him.

If Lady Ducie indeed kept her stepdaughter a prisoner she never visited her, and no one came to tell her of the girl's welfare, for, sometimes for weeks together, no human creature save the tradespeople passed the huge iron gates which shut in the inhabitants of Netherton Chase from the outer world.

"Iva, I have news for you."

It was May now, and Iva had kept his hopeless watch for two months.

The days were growing long and summer-like, the flowers in the cottage garden filled the air with fragrance, but Iva Ducie looked years older than when he came to Netherton not twelve months before.

His face had grown anxious, his features were pinched and sharpened, a kind of nervous expectation seemed stamped upon his expression.

Watching him with professional eyes, Dr. Sturgis decided that if no relief came soon to his terrible suspense he must sink beneath its strain.

No human creature could bear up against such long-continued mental pressure.

"News!"

The word seemed like rain in a desert land. Iva's whole face brightened, his dark eyes shone with thankfulness.

"I fear you may not think it much, but to me it seems the first ray of light in our night of perplexity."

"Don't keep me waiting!" Oh, the agony of entreaty in the voice! "I can't bear it, doctor!"

"I chanced to be in the post-office just now when that uncouth man my lady has selected as her sole male retainer came in. He brought a telegram, which he wanted sent off at once. The girl in the shop left it on the counter when she went in search of change. Iva, I don't know whether it was a dishonourable thing to do, but—I read it."

"And?"

"It was to Gordon, the noted physician, you know, urging him to come down at once."

Iva looked into his face.

"What does it mean?" growing pale.

"Not Gerda?"

"I can't say that; but it gives us this much hope. I have known Gordon for years intimately. He may achieve what you and I cannot."

"How?"

"We might call at the Chase as visitors, and spend a formal ten minutes in the drawing-room; he will see my lady off her guard. He will have a chance to ask questions that would be an impertinence in anyone else—aye, and have them answered."

Iva shook his head.

"But he won't know our trouble."

"He will."

"He will drive from the station to the Chase in one of my lady's carriages. It will be as impossible to get at him as if he were a crowned king."

"It won't; I have managed all that. The moment I saw the telegram I made up my mind. I sent off a despatch as well as Lady Ducie, and mine was to Gordon, too."

"What did you tell him?"

"I looked in Bradshaw, and saw he would probably come by the night train, which gets into Netherton at nine in the morning. I know it stops at Barclay, so my message was

very brief:—'Shall join the train at Barclay Junction; look out for me.'"

"Doctor, how am I to thank you?"

"Wait a bit; time enough for thanks when you see what comes of it."

"Shall I go with you?"

"Better not; you've the Chase to keep an eye on."

So Iva remained at his post, and was rewarded by seeing the infant lord's fine London nurse depart in a cab loaded with boxes, evidently bound for Netherton station.

Iva was quick to seize his opportunity. Taking his hat, he contrived to be outside his gate just as the cab came past.

Bowing as courteously as to a princess, he asked the nurse if she would allow him a seat in her conveyance; he particularly wished to meet a friend at Netherton, and feared he might be late if he trusted to his feet.

"I'm sure you're very welcome, sir," said the woman, blandly, making room for him. "It's a bad day for walking, too—so showery."

Iva Ducie possessed all the charm of a sailor's manner. He had travelled in many countries, had mixed with people of almost all nationalities, and he knew exactly how to adapt himself to his audience.

There was nothing in his conversation with Mrs. Nurse any human being could have taken offence at.

He paid her no fulsome compliments, no free-and-easy attentions, and yet in five minutes' time he was registered in her brain as the nicest gentleman she ever saw.

"I suppose you are going to town shopping?" said Mr. Ducie, presently. "You must want a little change sometimes, for the Chase seems given over to dullness just now."

"I'm going for good, sir."

"For good! Don't you like it?"

"It's enough to kill anyone, sir; the dullness is just awful. I've had three months of it. I don't say but what I've been well fed and handsomely paid, but I can't stand it; and as my late mistress has come home from America instead of ending her days there, as she thought to do, I'm just going back to her."

"Lady Ducie will be very sorry. She struck me as being a devoted mother."

"That's just what she is, sir. I often think myself she's too devoted. She's that wrapped up in the baby she thinks of nought else."

Iva doubted this.

"The place is just going to ruin, sir; and no wonder, with only those rough Yorkshire servants. Besides, my lady has shut up one whole wing. She says it was too big for so few people."

"Which part has she shut up?"

"The left wing, sir; it was there the poor young lady's rooms were—her that drowned herself; but, law, I shouldn't be naming her to you, sir. I forgot myself quite."

"You could not name anyone so dear to me. Don't you know she was my much-loved wife?"

Nurse sighed.

"She must have been a pretty creature. My lady showed me her portrait once."

"She was as beautiful as an angel. Nurse, do you know I have never believed her to be dead?"

"I'm sure she's dead, sir."

"How can you be sure, nurse?"

"I'm certain."

"But you can't be certain—unless you have seen her grave."

The nurse shuddered.

"I'm quite sure, Mr. Ducie; and, between ourselves, that's the true reason I am leaving Netherton Chase. I might have stood the dullness, seeing it was considered in my wages, but no amount of wages could have made me used to that."

"To what?" asked Iva, perplexed.

"To seeing her."

A wild thrill of hope ran through his veins.

"What do you mean? tell me!"

"Well, sir," said the woman, shivering, "you see, she didn't come to a natural end. You see her body has never been found, so she could not have a proper funeral. I dare say that explains it, poor dear young creature."

"Explains what?" Oh! what an effort it cost him to subdue his impatience and speak calmly to the woman. "Remember, I am more interested in Gerda's fate than anyone else can be. You look kind-hearted—surely you won't refuse to tell me all you know?"

"I should have thought you'd have begged me to hold my tongue. I'm sure, sir, if anyone I'd care for took to walk I shouldn't like to hear of it."

"Took to walk—who—Gerda?"

"The spirit, sir. Lor," said the nurse, who was superstitious enough to have satisfied even Mrs. Brown herself, "I've often heard told of such things, and I used to think I'd like to see a ghost, but I never want to again, never again."

"What did you see?"

"It was the young lady herself, sir, at least her spirit. I couldn't be mistaken. You see I'd seen her portrait. It was her herself, only paler and thinner, as of course the ghost would be. She was wrapped in something white and flowing, and all her hair had been cut off. Perhaps," concluded the good woman, "it doesn't do for ghosts to have long hair. Maybe it'd get in their way when they're gliding about so."

"You saw her? you are certain? where?"

"Last night, sir. I was pacing up and down the corridor with the baby in my arms—uncommon restless he was. I hear my lady's sent for the doctor to-day. I'm sure she'll never rest him."

Iva tried to bring her back to the point.

"Last night, you said, you were pacing in the corridor with the baby in your arms, and you saw—that?"

"I was near the west wing, the one that's shut up, and I heard a strange sound like some one moaning. I didn't like it, sir, for I never was fond of queer noises, and I'd turned back towards my own part of the house when the green baize door that shuts off the west wing opened without a bit of noise, and I saw it gliding gently along."

"Meaning Gerda?"

"Meaning the ghost, if you please, sir. She was almost up to me before I caught sight of her. Then I knew what she was, and I gave a awful shriek. My lady came rushing from her boudoir. I almost threw the baby into her arms and tore off to my own room. I looked myself in there and began to pack my boxes, for I'd made up my mind, wages or no wages, I'd leave to-day."

"And when did you speak to Lady Ducie?"

"She came to my door in a few minutes, and I had to let her in. She was almost as pale as the ghost had been, but she said nothing at all, only waited for me to speak. 'I'm real sorry, my lady,' I said, respectfully, 'I'd like to stay with you and the little lord, but I daren't. I'm a timid woman, and all my life I've been mortal afraid of ghosts.'"

"Wasn't she angry at your using such a word?"

"Not a bit. I expected her to be, but she only smiled in a strange, far-off sort of way she has, and said, 'I'm very sorry, Mrs. Blake, that you have seen it.'"

"She called it 'it' herself?"

"She did, sir. Then she went on, 'Of course you have heard of the tragedy in our family. I used to laugh at the idea of spectres and apparitions, but I dare not laugh now. Ever since that awful drive by the lake a strange, nameless something has haunted the rooms occupied by my stepchild. I had hoped by looking up the left wing the apparition would not trouble us. I fear I am mistaken.'"

Iva listened with breathless attention. Mrs. Blake felt flattered, and continued,—

"Law, my lady," I told her, "looks and

keys aren't no manner of use against ghosts. You'd better find the poor young creature's body and give it Christian burial. Depend upon it, the spirit will 'walk' till then."

"My lady looked thoughtful. 'I wish I could,' she said, gravely. 'Well, Mrs. Blake, I won't keep you up any longer to-night.' But I up and told her that night must be my last at the Chase; and though she didn't like it she saw I was in earnest, and had to give way. She behaved quite handsome—gave me a five-pound note over and above my wages, and asked me not to tell the reason of my leaving to her other servants, as they might take alarm, too. That Yorkshire family is such common folk I don't often lower myself to speak to 'em, and so I hadn't much difficulty in obeying my lady; but it's been a real comfort to tell all I've gone through to a gentleman like you, sir, and I do hope you don't think me a coward for running away? But when a woman's got to earn her own living, sir, you see she has to be careful of what brains she has!"

"I think you were very wise to go, and I am much obliged to you for your story. I assure you it has interested me very much."

"And you're not angry that I should have seen her 'walk'? It's not her fault, poor young lady. I dare say she was a sweet, gentle creature, and she can't bear the thought her body's not had decent burial. I'm sure I shall never forget her, sir. It was a beautiful face, only just the saddest I ever saw!"

To her surprise, Iva wrung her hand in his. "Thank you," he said, brokenly; "thank you, with all my heart!" and before Mrs. Blake had recovered from her astonishment they were at Netherton.

Of course, Mr. Ducie carried his story to Dr. Sturgis. In his impetuosity Iva would have liked to have driven off to the nearest magistrate and demanded a warrant to search the Chase, but the older man shook his head.

"I assure you, Iva, the Chase has been searched once from garret to cellars. Wait until you have more grounds before you speak to a magistrate."

Iva looked indignant.

"More grounds, sir? That woman saw my wife—actually saw her, doctor!"

"Not at all. She saw what she believed to be Gerda's ghost. If you stated Mrs. Blake saw your wife in the flesh she would be the first to contradict you."

Iva groaned.

"And I thought it such a grand discovery!"

"So it is, only have patience. Your impetuosity would spoil everything."

"I am tired of patience."

"Softly! It is not three months yet since you returned to England. Think of the people who have to spend years and years before they succeed in their life's object. You need not complain of waiting yet!"

"But they don't wait under such suspense as mine. Doctor, a year of this would kill me; I feel the anxiety is wearing me out."

And it was true. Short as was the time since he landed at Southampton he was terribly altered. A wasting sickness, a hand-to-hand conflict with death, would not have left crueler marks on Iva than had been wrought by these weeks of alternate hopes and fears—this terrible heart-sickening suspense.

"I know it," said the Dr. Sturgis, kindly. "It has been a hard struggle for you. Only wait until I have spoken to Gordon. He may be able to help us."

"I don't see how."

"I shall tell him to come straight to you after he has paid his visit at the Chase. You had better let him ask you a few medical questions, for I must spread it about I want to consult him about your health, otherwise my lady would suspect something."

Iva groaned.

"All right; but oh! doctor, I am so weary of this atmosphere of mystery and suspicion.

Almost everything I do has to be an acted deceit lest my lady should think this or fancy that. I want to be free once more—free to look the whole world in the face and speak my mind to them—free to play my own part in life boldly, not heeding whether it is prudent or cautious, so that it is honest and honourable. I never was meant for diplomacy, doctor. I was brought up a sailor, and I have a sailor's love for candour and plain speaking."

Dr. Sturgis laid his hand on the young man's shoulder tenderly, as his own father might have done.

"I know it is hard," he said, gently; "but you have a reward in view."

"Aye, Iva's quest! I am not tired of that. Never think I weary of the search for my darling, only if I could but go to work openly and fight with straightforward weapons!"

CHAPTER XIX.

It was early the following day when the awkward little rosy maid announced the arrival of the London physician.

My lady sat with her boy in her arms—she had hardly left them since his nurse's departure. She was a little doubtful how she was to procure another nurse. No one in Netherton merited the honour of attending upon the little peer, and there were reasons why his mother could not conveniently leave the Chase.

"Oh! doctor, is he very ill? Do you think he is going to die?"

Dr. Gordon had heard this woman's story. He feared a heavy sin stained her soul; but he was not at the Chase to judge its mistress, he had come to minister to her child. He took the little fellow in his arms, examined him attentively, and asked a few questions; then he said, gravely,—

"He is in no immediate danger; but he is a weakly child, and you will have great difficulty in rearing him."

The tears stole down her cheeks.

"He is all I have—my very all!"

"It is not a hopeless case, by any means," said the doctor, kindly. "A great deal of care, a mild climate, and devoted nursing will do much. If he were a poor man's child I should fear the worst; but, as it is, with every luxury at command, I think there is every chance in his favour."

Lady Ducie smiled through her tears.

"I will do everything you tell me—I will obey you implicitly. Only save him!"

"You made a mistake in sending for me. The constant care and supervision of a skillful medical man on the spot would be much better for an infant than the occasional visits of a physician. Luckily you have a very able man in the neighbourhood. I have known Dr. Sturgis for years, and I have the utmost confidence in him."

Her face blanched.

"I cannot send for him!"

"Why not?"

"We—," she hesitated, "we are not friends. We disagree on many points."

"Disagree on all but one: if you like, so that Dr. Sturgis uses his skill for your child, and you obey him, the rest matters nothing; so that you are friends within the nursery door you may be sworn foes without it."

"We have quarrelled. I doubt if he would come."

"He is not the man to refuse to do his best for a suffering child. This baby requires constant medical supervision. If you object to Dr. Sturgis leave this neighbourhood, and settle near some practitioner you can trust. In any case, you would have to go south in October; this place would be too bleak in winter."

"I would rather stay here."

"The matter is of no consequence for the present; I don't want to frighten you. The child may improve so much that before winter he will be quite strong and hearty, only you

must be cautious. And now I should like to give a few directions to the boy's nurse."

"He has none at present."

Dr. Gordon stared.

"My lady, do I understand you aright? No nurse!"

"She left yesterday, at a moment's notice. I did my utmost to persuade her to stay" (this was hardly true); "but she refused. She was a nervous, fanciful woman, and the size and loneliness of the house frightened her."

"Perhaps she had heard the ghost story."

Lady Ducie started.

"What do you mean?"

"The whole village rings with the report that there is a ghost at Netherston Chase."

"The absurdity of the thing."

"They say your stepdaughter's spirit haunts the west wing, and that you have considerably had the whole of the rooms in that part cut off from communication with the rest of the house. In fact, that you have given over the west wing for the sole use of the ghost."

My lady bit her lip.

"Dr. Gordon, I am the most unhappy woman upon this earth! Whatever I do is distorted; my most innocent actions are coloured so as to appear criminal. I am friendless and alone, a fit mark for ridicule and persecution."

The physician took her hand.

"I never meant to offend you. Honestly, I fancied the ghost theory might account for the nurse's abrupt departure."

"It was the reason she gave."

"And then she spread the report the house was haunted?"

"I think the report was about before. When my husband died the whole staff of servants chose to consider me a thief because he left his fortune to me and my child instead of to my stepdaughter."

"And you dismissed them all at a sweep?"

"Why should I keep people about me who distrusted me? I might have filled the house with another staff of servants, but two reasons deterred me. I always meant as soon as the mystery of Gerda's fate was solved to travel abroad. It was hardly worth while to engage servants for so short a time. And the other motive influenced me yet more strongly. I always had a hope that she might venture back to the home of her childhood. I felt she would come in trouble, alone, sorrowful, perhaps destitute. I thought the shame, the misery of such a home-coming would be better concealed if there was no crowd of menials to make their comments."

Dr. Gordon decided his friend Sturgis was an idiot to be imposed upon by that mad young Ducie. They ought to be imprisoned, the pair of them, for presuming to doubt such a fair and gracious lady, one who was so sweetly considerate to her erring stepdaughter, whose every thought seemed full of charity.

He accepted my lady's invitation to luncheon, and spent a very pleasant morning in her society. She must certainly have been a woman of talent when he entered her presence, he determined, for in half-an-hour she had converted him into an admiring champion.

"Are you nervous, Doctor Gordon?"

They were at lunch now, the rosy-cheeked handmaid had departed, the physician was sipping his claret thoughtfully, a very heavy fee was in his pocket, and he was thoroughly satisfied with his visit to Netherston.

"Not the least in the world."

"It would be a great satisfaction to me if you would consent to examine the west wing."

"To examine it," thoughtfully. "Surely, my Lady Ducie, you have not been converted to a belief in ghosts?"

"Oh, no," she blushed, "but I believe the ghost stories all have their origin in dislike to me. If you as a man of the world, a skillful physician, universally respected, could assert

you had examined the place and saw no signs of anything supernatural the rumours might die out and my home be at peace again."

"I shall be delighted."

"Then come with me."

Dr. Gordon was, as he said, not in the least nervous. Besides, it was broad daylight, quite early in a summer afternoon.

Certainly they had chosen a strange time to look for ghosts, but he followed his hostess in amused silence till they came to the green baize door described by Mrs. Blake.

"I had this put up," said my lady, simply.

"Now, Doctor, we are passing to the ghost's dominions."

One thing struck him—she closed the baize door after her, and carefully locked it, placing the key in her pocket before she continued her way.

Dr. Gordon looked at everything minutely. He was in a long corridor with rooms on either side.

My lady took him into every one—guest-chambers, for the most part, fitted up with every luxury. Beyond was the picture-gallery, which they traversed in perfect silence.

The west wing seemed to the physician one of the finest parts of the house. As to ghosts, it was all nonsense. The rooms were just ordinary apartments. The place looked as if it had been inhabited every day. It was perfectly ridiculous to assert it was troubled by supernatural visitants.

They stood looking at an excellent picture of Lord Ducie. My lady had pointed it out specially to the physician, and he gave it a fair meed of attention.

Both of them were fully engaged with the portrait—for the moment they had forgotten what they came to the west wing to look for—when a voice fell on their ear, sweet and low, singing an old ballad. The voice lacked power—it seemed weak and rather quivering, but it was perfectly distinct, and the words fell clearly upon Dr. Gordon's ear. It was the saddest, sweetest lay in Balfe's opera of the Bohemian Girl. "The heart bowed down with weight of woe."

Dr. Gordon turned to his companion.

"Hark!"

In perfect silence they listened until the song was ended.

Lady Ducie shivered from head to foot.

The physician looked inquisitive.

"Who is that?"

She caught his arm.

"That is what the nurse told me it sang."

Oh! Doctor Gordon, can it be true, after all?"

"Nonsense!" said the physician, more sharply than he was wont to speak to ladies of title. "You know there are no such things as ghosts—we live in the nineteenth century!"

"Then what is it?"

"One of the servants."

"I have no female servants except the girl who waited at lunch, her sister, who is deaf and dumb, and their mother, a woman of sixty."

"Someone has looked in to gossip with them."

"But where?"

"Where! Why in the room next the gallery, of course; that's where the sound came from."

"That room was Gerda's," again she observed. "If you remember, we have just left it. There was no one there then?"

"Someone has got in since."

"But how? You saw me lock the green baize door after we had passed through; there is no other means of gaining access to this wing."

Dr. Gordon looked full in her face.

"Lady Ducie, what do you mean?"

"It is quite true," she said, simply. "I wanted you to see the rooms for my own satisfaction. I never thought we should see anything."

"But what is that singing?"

"I cannot say."

"Have you ever heard it before?"

"Once."

"When?"

"The night before last. It was just before nurse's shrieks called me to the corridor, where she was walking up and down with the baby."

"And you saw nothing?"

"Nothing."

"There are no such things as ghosts," said the doctor, with his former determined air. He seemed to derive great satisfaction from this statement, for he had made it several times. "Someone, no doubt, is playing a trick upon you."

Lady Ducie clasped her hands.

"They could not get into the house unless admitted by the servants."

"I should like to speak to the servants," began the physician, abruptly. "You see—"

He did not tell Lady Ducie what he saw, for once again the voice which so startled them broke upon their ears. It was a Scotch song now, "The land of the leal," and appealed strongly to Dr. Gordon's admiration.

"It can't be a ghost," he persisted, as the last strain died away. "It would be a shame for a ghost to sing so well."

"I think there is something weird about it. The voice is so weak and quivering!"

"The voice sounds like ill-health. Lady Ducie, let us inspect the bedroom which is the other side of this part of the gallery again."

They inspected it again without discovering anything to explain the phenomenon. There was no sign that the room had been entered since they left it.

"We will go downstairs," said the physician, quickly. "It does not do to brood over these things."

"No."

They went downstairs, and, at my lady's orders, all her retainers came up for the doctor's inspection, but when he had seen the bluff, rough-spoken Yorkshire serving-man, his old toothless wife, the deaf and dumb daughter, and the rosy-cheeked sister, he knew they were not of the stuff to arrange practical jokes or even to be tampered with by others; they might be uncouth, but there was a certain bluff fidelity about them which made the physician understand why my lady had been so certain of their confidence.

"Do they know the manor?" he asked her in French.

When she turned her head he went over to the group, and asked them pointblank if they had admitted anyone to the Chase that day.

The old man shook his head.

"We admit no gossips in these parts, sir; we keep ourselves to ourselves. The folks hereabouts is that talkative and foolish they aren't fit company for honest Yorkshire people!"

"Besides," put in his wife, "all the village is dead spiteful against our mistresses. We come from Hornsea, where Mr. Barton lives. He said it 'ud just make our fortune to serve his sister; and now we're earning more wages in a month than we did before in a year, it isn't likely we should turn against the hand that gives it us!"

This was conclusive. Dr. Gordon asked if they had thought at all about the noises and apparitions said to infest the west wing. The whole family replied confidently they believed rats would explain the whole affair.

"Rats can't sing," said the doctor, sagely.

"Rats can do lots of things," returned the father. "If my lady 'ud only be content to live in the rest of the house and just give up that west wing for good and all, it wouldn't matter what went on there."

"Lady Ducie," said Dr. Gordon, as they withdrew, "I am sure those people are to be trusted."

"I know it."

"But that does not explain things. I wish I could help you. I can suggest only one



[UNDER EXAMINATION—A DARING RUSE.]

thing—that you should leave Netherton at once."

"I cannot."

"For your child's sake."

"He is so young, it cannot hurt him."

"But nurses are proverbially credulous and superstitious. How will you retain one in your service?"

"I will risk it."

"You would be better in all respects away. Your own health will surely suffer in time."

"I must risk that, Dr. Gordon. There is a great deal of prejudice afloat against me in this place. I will not be a coward, and give way to it and run away. I mean to live it down."

"What an age you have been!"

Dr. Sturgis may be pardoned if he spoke a little sharply. He had expected his *confrère* to meet him at Lime Cottage by ten o'clock; it was after four when the London physician at last made his appearance.

"You have discovered something?" cried Iva, with a ring of hope in his voice. "What is it?"

"Something that will not please you. I have discovered that you have been troubling yourself with a mare's nest."

"My wife's loss is no mare's nest, sir," said Iva, passionately.

"Your wife, my good sir, lies in the lake. I can make allowance for you; her loss has evidently shattered your brain, but how my friend Sturgis can have aided and abetted you in your suspicion I can't make out."

"Then you think—"

The doctor interrupted him.

"I am convinced that Lady Ducie has been grievously wronged by you both. She is a good, true woman—harshly judged, and cruelly maligned."

Iva stared.

"How about the ghost in the west wing, Dr. Gordon? 'Good, true women' don't generally boast a ghost as their personal attendant."

To their intense surprise the doctor looked taken aback. He was not ready with an answer.

"Have you seen it?" asked Iva.

"There is nothing to see."

"I am sure you know something concerning it. Lady Ducie told you of it."

"She did more. At her urgent entreaty I consented to search the west wing. The opinion of an outsider—a man of known commonsense—might, she thought, do something to silence slanderous tongues. We went together; we examined every room in the west wing, and I am ready to pass my solemn word that I saw nothing that would give rise to the stories floating about the neighbourhood."

Dr. Sturgis had been watching them closely. The two were old friends, and he understood the great man as few others did.

"I am sure you are perplexed yourself," he said, slowly. "Gordon, if you saw nothing you have at least formed some theory about the matter. I can see you have gone over to my lady's side, but surely it cannot injure her to tell us your free opinion. Remember this poor boy's happiness is at stake"—he laid one hand on Iva's arm. "Only let him feel sure his wife is dead, and I think he has courage to bear the loss. It is the uncertainty of her fate, the awful suspense, that is fast destroying him."

Gordon was softened.

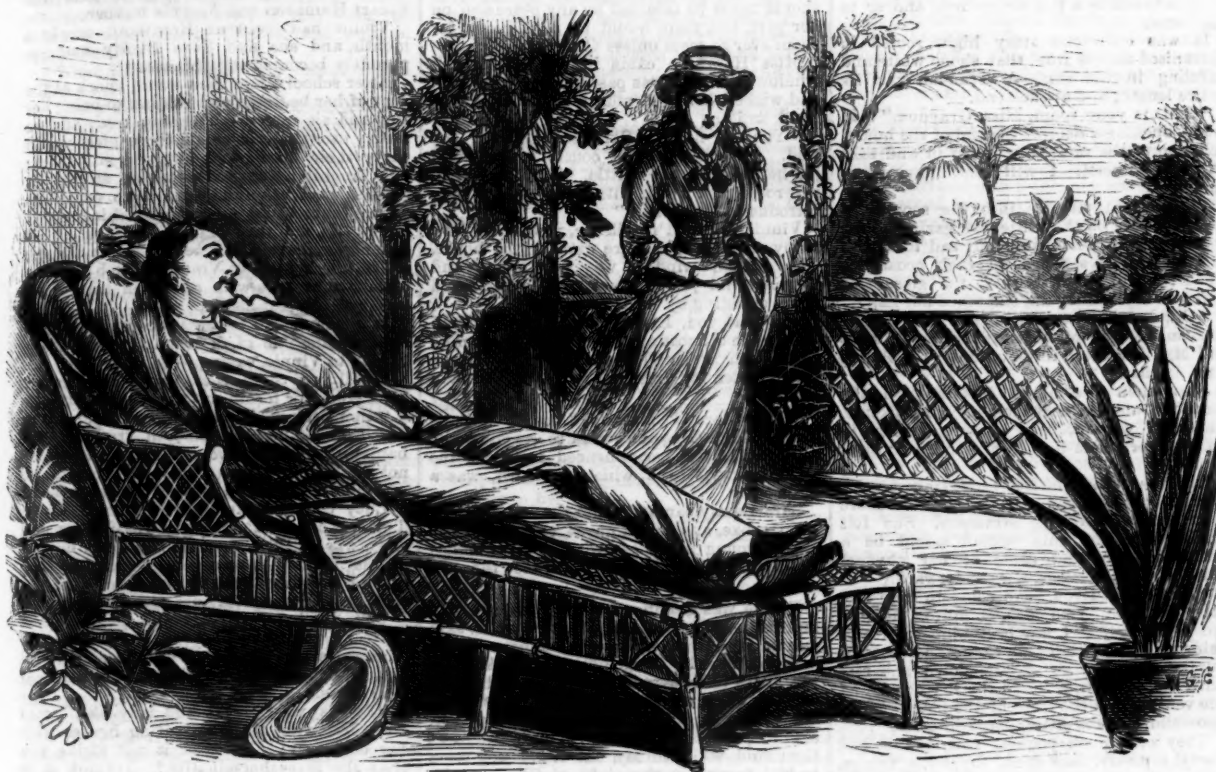
"I do not mind telling you all I know. It is little enough. I do not, I cannot believe in ghosts, and yet I own it is hard to account for what I am going to tell you unless by supernatural agency. I was standing before the late lord's portrait in the picture-gallery with Lady Ducie, when we distinctly heard a voice singing. It was a sweet, low voice, and the song was 'The heart bowed down.' We were so surprised we were almost spellbound. At my suggestion we went back to the room adjoining the picture-gallery—the one immediately at the rear of the portrait. We saw

no trace of human occupation, but again we heard the voice. I won't believe in ghostly agency. I am convinced the servants are above suspicion, and I know that the key of the west wing was in Lady Ducie's possession. I own I am puzzled. Sturgis, old friend, I don't share your prejudice against Lady Ducie, but I would help you and this young man with all my heart if only it was in my power, but how can I? Even if I knew whose voice I heard singing it would throw no light upon the mystery of his wife's disappearance."

Iva looked up quickly, and said, gravely,—
"It was her favourite song."

(To be continued.)

STORING UP HEAT.—The method of storing up heat so that it may be utilised in the everyday affairs and necessities of life, which has attracted so much attention of late, presents a practical realisation of peculiar interest in the footwarmers now coming into use. The plan consists in using in the footwarmers acetate of soda instead of water—acetate of soda, as is well understood, being a neutral salt in crystals, which melts somewhere about the boiling point of water; and the footwarmer, after being completely filled with the crystals of this salt, is sealed hermetically, then put into an oven until the crystals are melted and the acetate assumes a liquid form; at this stage the warmer cools down gradually, in which operation the liquid crystallises, and, during this crystallisation, it throws out the latent heat absorbed to convert the salt from a solid to a liquid form. The fact that these warmers remain hot for some eighteen hours is not more interesting than that even then the crystallisation is incomplete, and that, on tapping or shaking, the crystallisation of those parts of the substance which had remained uncrystallized commences, and they again become hot.



["VINNIE!" HE CRIES, STARTING, HIS FACE LIGHTED UP WITH JOY!]

NOVELETTE]

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

CHAPTER I.

AMONG STRANGERS.

"WHAT will they be like?"

A young and pretty girl, with deep amber eyes and chestnut hair, seated in a trap that was driving in a jolty manner, anything but pleasant, over the rough, uneven roads of M—, asked herself this question over and over again; while an anxious light crept into her eyes, and the sweet, though rather large, mouth quivered as a troubled child's.

And no wonder; Vinnie Graydon was on her way to her first situation up in the bush of Australia, while all she held dear on earth were separated from her by thousands of miles of sea.

It was the old tale of a stepmother and family pride which forbade honest work, and Vinnie Graydon had left home and country to seek peace and quiet in another land. As yet she had met with nothing but kindness, people pitying the lovely shy-faced girl whose glance was so truthful, and whose manner spoke of habitual discourse with educated people.

Wide fields of young sugar-cane stretched away to the base of dark mountains, whose summits were clothed in a deep blue haze; black faces were lifted as the buggy drove on, and gleaming eyes peered curiously up at the lovely stranger; drays drawn by oxen passed them, strange bright-coloured birds fluttered above them.

Nothing—not one single feature—to remind her of the old country; the tall palms and bamboos seemed to beckon her on, and the harsh, loud rustle of the wind through the cane seemed to whisper "on to your fate."

It was with a great sigh of relief that she heard her companion say, pointing his whip in the direction of what appeared a cluster of

houses nestling among palms, bamboos, firs and banians,—

"There's Brentland! But wait, miss, I must coo-ey; you have to cross the river."

Poor Vinnie sat down again with another sigh; by this time her face and hand were burned scarlet by the scorching sun which had been in their faces during the whole twelve-mile drive. She had both parasol and gloves, but George Clinton had unknowingly taken a seat on the gloves, and she had been too shy to ask for them, and her parasol remained where it fell—at the back of the trap—on starting, for the same reason.

Just then, Vinnie was too weary and heart-sore to note the rugged beauty of the spot on which they had halted, but afterwards it all came back to her as she then saw it. Two high, steep banks clothed in tall sword grass, and thickly wooded with graceful palms, tall white gums and fig trees, from whose branches luxuriant vines hung in festoons of nature's own graceful looping; and between a narrow shining river, winding and twisting and curving, until it lost itself among the foliage in the distance.

Very soon there came an answering coo-ey, and a few moments later a tall, slight, fair-haired girl came quickly up the bank, holding out her hand to Vinnie, with a bright smile that cheered the girl's heart.

"We will go first and leave the boys to bring your luggage afterwards," she said, at the same time turning and leading the way down the bank. And Vinnie, after bidding her escort good-bye, followed. A flat-bottomed boat was drawn up on the bank below, and soon the two girls were in it and across to the opposite bank, where stood a tall, slight, young fellow with a stock-whip in his hand and an angry scowl on his face.

Vinnie could not tell whether he was good-looking or the reverse, the scowl so disfigured him; but she thought if the large dark eyes had not that coldly passionate light of anger

in them they would be beautiful enough to redeem a very plain face.

He was dressed in a slovenly way, as though he had no care with regard to his personal appearance. Vinnie even thought that he glanced down at his mud-bespattered duck trousers and loose untidy shirt with a kind of pleased defiance, and she wondered a little.

"My brother Stuart," said Lucy Hamilton, looking at him in surprise, for there had been a discussion up at the house as to who was to go and row the new governess over, wherein he had declared that she might stop the other side all day if she waited for him to row the boat.

Vinnie bowed, not understanding the ways of the country, and his hand fell back at his side while the frown deepened on his brow.

"An ugly little upstart," he said to himself, staring at the pretty face all scorched and blistered with the sun, and now doubly flushed at the advent of this strangely-behaved member of the family, with whom she had come to live.

"Oh, dear!" was her thought. "I never thought there were any grown-up sons. I hope he is not always at home!"

Little did either think as they stood there on the soft green river bank, under the shade of some tea trees, the terrible ending their acquaintance would have. No warning entered either heart; no thought of what they would be to one another, as he turned sullenly away muttering something about seeing that the boys brought the luggage safely across; and Lucy said,—

"Come along, Miss Graydon; he will look after your things."

It seemed a long way up the bank, and along a sloping, grassy place, which ran beside a paddock full of tall Indian corn, and which Lucy called the road, and she felt her poor face growing hotter and hotter with each step. What a prepossessing object to be presented as the English governess!

They reached the garden at last, and

passed through the wooden gate, which was overshadowed by a tall mango tree, and so to the house.

It was only one story high, roofed in galvanized-tinned iron, that shone white and dazzling in the sun. A verandah ran its entire length, and at each end.

"This is your room, Miss Graydon," said Lucy, opening a door at the end of the house, going on to the verandah. "Go in and take off your bonnet. I will send mamma to you."

Vinnie went silently into the room, and seated herself on the white bed, gazing round with that half wondering, half sad look that the face always takes on such occasions. Then she rose and went to the glass, and removed her bonnet and smoothed her hair.

"Oh, dear!" she said, with a half sob, as she caught sight of her flushed face. "What will Mrs. Hamilton think of me? I look like a red Indian."

Just then she heard footsteps on the verandah, and the next moment a handsome, dark-eyed woman, with a sweet, motherly light on her whole face, appeared at the open door.

The first sound of her kind, sincere voice won the girl's heart, and she felt no more that she was among strangers. She felt instinctively that this woman would be a friend to her, and some of her shyness vanished, as she rose and went forward.

"I am so glad you have come to help me, Miss Graydon," said Mrs. Hamilton, holding out her hand. "I am beginning to tire of being in harness so long. Come and see your pupils, and then go and lie down and rest until luncheon time," and she led her round the verandah to the front of the house, where two children were sitting hand-in-hand.

They were much younger than Vinnie had thought, pretty, dark-eyed, shy, little things, who made the girl think of the children she had left at home with their unsympathetic stepmother.

"Your face is dreadfully red," said the girl who was the younger of the two. "and Alfred says he thinks you are ugly, but we both think we shall like you," and having been so condescending she lapsed into silence.

"Miss Graydon will excuse you for your rudeness, because she knows you know no better; but, remember, it angers me when you forget yourselves so," remarked their mother, gravely and quietly, then turning to Vinnie, "We lunch at twelve. Go to your room and try to sleep until then. You look tired."

And Vinnie went, feeling that she should grow to love the children, but feeling also that there was a difficult task before her, for she saw by the fearless eyes lifted to the mother's face when she administered that reproof, and the half smile on the young lips, that they were petted and let to have their own way.

CHAPTER II.

JEALOUSY.

WHEN Vinnie awoke next morning she glanced round the little unfamiliar room with a half dreamy sense of having found a home—at least, for a time—in this strange land, and her heart was lighter than it had been for months, as she jumped quickly out and commenced her toilet.

She and Mrs. Hamilton had had a long talk on the previous evening, during which a few little things which she would be expected to do were mentioned, and one was to see that the table was properly laid at meal-times, there being only a black woman as servant.

With a half shy feeling she went round the house to the dining-room, but all was silent there, and so she set about her first piece of work, laying the serviettes, and placing the butter and jam near the vase full of flowers in a tasteful manner.

Life would be very pleasant here, she thought. The family seemed so really pleasant with the exception of the eldest son, and

if it was his desire to keep her in her place he should never be troubled by any intrusion on her part, and there would be no occasion for them ever to meet unless at meals.

Miss Hamilton came in at the French window as Vinnie was passing out of the door, and wished her good-morning with a bright, frank smile.

"You did not see Sara last night?" she said. "She is a kind of cousin, and is staying here with us for a little. Come round to my room, and I will introduce you. I hate introductions at meals."

Vinnie followed in silence, wondering how many more people there were in the house. The French window was half open, and Vinnie could just see a round, white-robed figure standing by the dressing-table.

"Is that you, Lucy?" called out a shrill, clear voice of most astonishing power, coming from such a small person. "I wish you would fasten my dress; my arms won't reach round."

"Poor Sara!" laughed Lucy. "I have brought Miss Graydon round to see you," she continued, as she commenced fastening the rebellious waistband, which, in truth, was a trifle tight.

Sara Bently came out into the full light as Lucy spoke, and gazed up at the lovely face of the young governess with a cool impertinence that brought a flush to the fair cheeks.

Vinnie was looking very fair; the sun had not really scorched her, and the white skin was pearly and transparent, with just a tint of carmine, like the inside of a shell. A lovely face, with those earnest, hazel eyes to light it, and framed in an abundance of glossy, wavy chestnut hair; a lovely little figure altogether, clad in pale blue batiste, with lace ruffles at the round, white throat, but it did not seem to find favour in the sight of Sara Bently, whose steel-blue eyes took an expression of cold, cruel dislike.

"How do you like Australia?" she asked, extending her hand, and giving Vinnie a "flabby" shake.

"I like what I have seen," returned Vinnie, her clear, low voice sounding doubly musical after the sharp, abrupt tones of the other.

"Oh, you are one of the cautious sort—never give a decided opinion for fear it might be brought up against you," was almost the rude rejoinder, as Sara turned and re-entered the bedroom.

"What a strange girl! I hope she will not be here long," thought Vinnie, as she moved away with an uncomfortable feeling that she had made one enemy at Brentland already, though the cause she was unable to fathom.

Vinnie Graydon was perfectly unconscious of her exceeding beauty; she knew that she was pretty, she would tell you frankly, but the extent of her charms she was not aware of, which perhaps enhanced her natural grace of manner; and therefore it never occurred to her that Sara Bently, with her short figure, utterly devoid of grace, her long, thin, sawn face, her dust coloured, scant hair and ugly voice, had conceived a sudden and violent hatred for the lovely, fresh-faced governess; and it never entered into her thoughts how this girl's dislike would affect her future. If it had she would not have dismissed it from her mind with such indifference.

A little later the breakfast-bell rang, and Vinnie went swiftly round, hoping to gain her seat before the others had assembled; but Stuart was already in his place, and when Vinnie, according to the custom of polite society, merely bade him good morning, he lifted his great dark eyes and stared without opening his lips.

"I wish I knew how Mrs. Hamilton would take it, for then I would never address him at all," thought the girl, her sensitive lips quivering at the insult.

Mrs. Hamilton was so kind and attentive that Vinnie soon forgot her mortification, and she rose from that meal feeling more sure

that in time she should grow to hate this Stuart Hamilton and love his mother.

Vinnie had been at Brentland nearly a month, and she and Sara Bently had apparently become better friends.

After school hours Sara would knock at the door of her bedroom and ask her to bring her rug and sit under the banian tree; and so nearly every afternoon the three girls would carry their needlework out, and sit talking and laughing, sometimes telling stories, or little anecdotes, and there were occasions when Stuart would join them, laughing too, at the stories, and throwing in a remark of his own now and again, but never, by any chance, addressing a word to Vinnie, though his eyes often sought hers with a look in them that was certainly not dislike.

It was on one of those rare occasions, when Stuart made one of their party, that Lucy turned to Vinnie, saying—

"Will you come with me to the scrub? I am going for ferns; my vases want filling."

"Don't ask me!" exclaimed Sara, leaning her head against the smooth trunk of the banian. "All the lovers in the world would not make me tramp down that bank and scramble over rocks and what-not for ferns."

Lucy coloured vividly and turned away. This was her lover's night for visiting her, and she always filled the vases with fresh flowers in his honour—a very sweet and innocent way of showing her love, but Sara chose to scoff at all these pretty usages of Lucy's.

"We don't want Stuart, and he would not come if we asked him," she remarked to Vinnie, as they sauntered quietly along, and Vinnie echoed both sentiments with real heartiness.

"She is very pretty and lady-like," said Sara, following their retreating figures with her cold eyes; "but does it not strike you that she gives herself airs? I think it is a great mistake to make so much of a governess."

"The mater always treats our governesses as if they were our friends," replied Stuart, appearing not to notice her first remark, but there was a look of admiration in the dark eyes that followed the white-robed figure that was eminently displeasing to Sara Bently.

"You did not answer my question," she said, looking up into the handsome young face, for Stuart Hamilton was really handsome when that awful scowl did not mar its beauty, and on this warm summer's afternoon he was in a particularly good humour, having even condescended to ask Vinnie what the flower was which she was cowering on pale blue satin.

"There is only one reply," he answered, not looking at Sara while he spoke. "She is very lovely, but I agree with you that she is made too much of, and seems to expect the attention which she gets."

"Ah, that is it; she has been accustomed to being petted and made much of, and even those who condemn the thing fall into the habit," was the slow, quiet rejoinder.

"And," went on the shrill, ugly voice—very ugly now with that malice in its tones—"even I, who know it is wrong, cannot help spoiling her. You will be the next. I noticed you asked her to sing last night!"

Over the handsome dark face came a red, angry flush, and the eyes which had looked so soft and tender a moment before flashed coldly with passion. Stuart was just at that age when men do not like to be thought in love, and the mockery in his cousin's voice seemed to lash him to fury.

"If" he cried, jumping up and flinging his head back. "Do you know that she is three years older than I am—?" and then he paused. Sara had not mentioned love, she only said "pay her attention." Did he really hate this hazel-eyed, English girl, or was it the birth of a nobler, sweeter sentiment that he was striving to crush beneath the semblance of hate?

"Stuart, mon garçon, you are too hasty. I

did not mean anything so serious as that," retorted Sara. "But even if that were the case remember she is English, and you an Australian."

"What difference does that make?" in a sullen voice.

"Every difference. Cannot you see that she and Lucy appear to be the same age, and Lucy is nearly four years younger?"

"Will you leave off chatting about that girl? I hate the very sound of her name," and with these words Stuart walked unceremoniously away, whistling defiantly, yet with a strange mixture of emotions at his heart.

"I must watch and prevent their becoming too friendly," said Sara to herself, as her eyes followed her cousin's tall, well-knit figure, a longing look in their depths, her face pale and angry. "He is half in love with her already—I knew it when I first saw her—but I swear if I cannot win his love she shall never be his," and then Sara rose and walked away, forgetting the rugs and workbasket in her anger.

Lucy and Vinnie returning from their scramble, laden with long drooping fronds of maidenhair, saw the rugs and gathered them up.

"Those two have gone off for a stroll, I suppose," remarked Lucy, with a rather significant smile. "No wonder she did not come with us."

A sensation something akin to pain swept over Vinnie at Lucy's words, yet, she told herself, Stuart Hamilton and his loves was nothing to do with her, and then she fell to wondering how he could love that girl with the ugly voice and keen, malicious eyes. Truly love must be blind if they were lovers! She was very quiet when they returned to the house, and, indeed, all that evening, so quiet that Mrs. Hamilton remarked on it, asking if she were indisposed or tired.

"You must go to bed and have a good rest," she said, kindly. "It will never do for you to be ill to-morrow."

"Oh, I mean to dance holes in my shoes," returned Vinnie, looking up with a bright smile. "I am not tired, Mrs. Hamilton, only have my thinking cap on."

"Is that all? Then come into the sitting-room and give us a song," and Mrs. Hamilton led the way as if a refusal were impossible.

Vinnie's voice was more remarkable for sweetness than strength, but she was perfect mistress of it, and rendered her songs in a way that appealed to the feelings far more than some of those who were voted splendid singers; and Stuart, who was passionately fond of music, found himself listening in rapt attention to the low, clear tones as they echoed softly round the quiet room:—

"Waiting, so wearily waiting,

Waiting for sympathy sweet,

For some one to love and to love me."

As she sang those last words their eyes met, and something in his made her falter and strike several wrong notes, but the next moment she went on, her voice stronger than before, for there was a rising anger in her heart. What did he mean by looking at her like that when no one could see, and then when all eyes were upon him deliberately insulting her?

Vinnie was timid and retiring, but there was a fund of deep passion lying dormant in her young soul, and a strong share of human pride, and she almost felt that she could strike Stuart Hamilton for that glance of admiration, perhaps felt all the more indignant that, spite of his rudeness, his admiration made her heart leap and throb as it had never done before at a man's glance, though Vinnie had been engaged once.

She had broken off that old engagement when she left England, for something told her that she should feel more sorrow than this, at parting with the man who was to be her companion through all the ills and joys of life; and so, in spite of his pleadings and those

of his family, she had left the old country free. Vinnie and her old lover still corresponded by right of their cousinship, but it was now only in a cousinly strain, though at first his letters had been full of protestations of love and passionate appeals for her to return.

In the course of conversation she had, as girls will, told Lucy and Sara of her former engagement, and also of a young fellow in Brisbane with whom she corresponded, and whom she liked with such a strong feeling of pure friendship that it never could ripen into love.

She little knew how her innocent confidences would be used by one hearer.

"Of whom were you thinking, Miss Graydon?" asked Mrs. Hamilton, as Vinnie finished her second song, "In the gloaming."

"I know!" cried Sara, with a meaning glance and a smile that she tried to make arch, but which only looked malicious, at least to Vinnie, who flushed hotly as she rose from the piano.

"Must one always be thinking of one's own private affairs to render a song properly, Miss Bently?" she asked, laughing, but there was a tremor in her voice.

A kind of hunted feeling came over her as she felt all eyes turned on her face, but she did not show it in her manner.

"You will excuse me, I know, Mrs. Hamilton," she added, "when I tell you my head aches."

"Why did you not say so before, Miss Graydon?" exclaimed Mrs. Hamilton, in real concern. "I noticed you played some false notes. You are tired, though you would not acknowledge it just now. Go to your room at once. Good-night."

As Stuart turned from bidding the governess good-night his eyes met those of Sara bent upon him with an amused scorn in them, and his face flushed.

He felt angry with Sara for that look. Surely it was only an act of necessary courtesy to offer his hand when the girl was bidding them all good-night! Then he grew angry with Vinnie for having gone to bed first, and, lastly, with himself for caring at all what either of these girls thought of him.

But all the same, when he was alone in his room that night he sat down by the window idly watching the queer shadows the moon cast upon the dark earth as it filtered through the glossy-leaved boughs of the orange-trees, and wondered, half-jealously, who it was that Sara meant when she said, "I know."

Was Vinnie Graydon engaged? Was she in love with someone who—pah! What was it to him?

"I think Sara is right. I am falling into the trap!" he muttered, throwing the end of his cigar away, and turning away from the window.

CHAPTER III.

THE SERPENT AT WORK.

OVER the wide moonlit grounds of Brentland there echoed the sounds of music, gay voices, and laughter.

The verandah was one mass of moving figures, and out on the lawn several couples were dancing in the moonlight.

Amongst these latter was Vinnie, her fair face aglow with innocent pleasure—her hazel eyes sparkling.

Ever and anon a soft, low laugh fell from her lips at some remark of her partners; and Stuart, standing under a huge mango tree, from whence he could see without being seen, watched her with an eagerness that was quite out of proportion with his usual manner of utter indifference.

How lovely she looked with the strong light of the southern moon falling upon her in caressing beauty, showing up the golden tints of her bronze hair, lingering lovingly about the round, perfect figure!

She was attired in a white Indian muslin, with pale blue ribbons fluttering about it in a most bewilderingly graceful fashion, and as Stuart watched the tiny feet moving airily over the soft grass, he told himself that he had never seen anyone so really beautiful in his life.

It was nearly an hour later. Vinnie was sitting on the verandah watching the fireflies flitting through the dark, shining magnolias, whose perfume filled the air, when a man's figure stood between her and the light, and Stuart's voice, soft and low as she had never before heard it, said,—

"May I have the pleasure, Miss Graydon—it's a mazurka?"

Vinnie bowed and rose, feeling as if the ground was slipping away from beneath her feet, but she soon conquered this foolish, nervousness, as she termed it, and Stuart had no awkwardness to complain of in his partner. Sara pleaded fatigue to her partner in the middle of the dance, not that she was really tired, but had caught sight of Stuart and Vinnie whirling round together with a look on both their faces which sent a thrill of hatred through her mean soul.

"She will win him if I am not careful," she muttered, half aloud, almost forgetting where she was in her anger; but her partner's abstracted "I beg pardon" recalled her thoughts. "I see you are fascinated with our pretty governess also," she laughed, coldly, following the direction of his eyes.

"Pretty! I call her more than pretty. She is perfectly lovely and perfectly natural, which is such a rare charm nowadays that when one sees it it is impossible not to be fascinated!" was the cool rejoinder of her companion, who was one of those men who always said exactly what he meant.

"Yes; but she is a flirt for all that. I only judge from her own confession," said Sara, carelessly, and then once more she and her partner joined the dancers.

When the dance was over she looked round for Stuart and Vinnie. Vinnie was standing amid a group of young people, laughing and chatting in the amusing way she could when not nervous, and Stuart was leaning against a post of the verandah, watching the mobile face with a look of love and passion dawning his dark eyes. Vinnie, though she appeared unconscious, felt that gaze, and chafed on more gaily than before, while her heart beat and her pulses throbbed so that it seemed to her that her companions must hear the throbs. A wild impulse to run away and hide herself was upon her; for during that one short dance when she had been encircled by his arms, and felt the gaze of his dark eyes upon her face, had come the revelation that she loved this young Australian—loved him with a love that could never die—and he was three years her junior.

She must keep her love to herself; by no act of hers must he ever know that he

"Was her soul's unerring light."

Her secret must be held close in her own heart. But would not her eyes betray? Could such a depth of love be kept from leaping to those true windows of the soul? Ah, no! but she would never glance at him again.

No one would notice if she avoided Stuart—it had become such a matter of course that he disliked her—that such conduct on her part would be taken as quite natural. So she decided as she stood there, apparently so light-heartedly careless, but in reality weighing her own fate and happiness with what was best and wisest for the man she loved.

And so it ever is; while onlookers are remarking that So-and-so bears their trouble well—meaning that So-and-so is heartless—that person is hugging the sorrow close to the heart, letting it eat and sop the very well-spring of life! But, and they say proudly, "the world cannot pity me!" and go on their way to the end misjudged by all save their Maker.

"See how she brightens up when in the company of a few young people of the other

sex!" observed Sara, gliding quietly up to where Stuart stood, and he looked down at her with a shade of defiance in his eyes. "Of course it is quite natural in so young a girl, but she is not quite the timid, retiring mouse we have hitherto imagined."

"I cannot see any harm in enjoying oneself," retorted Stuart, half irritably, and Sara bit her lips in quick anger.

"No, I did not mean that. I was thinking of the poor young fellow she jilted," answered Sara, a cadence of affected sadness in her false voice. "She is not over-burdened with heart to forget so soon."

Stuart felt a cold thrill pass through him at Sara's words, and he bent his head to question her about "the poor jilted lover," but Sara, having administered her dose of deceit and treachery, had glided away as softly as she came, leaving it to rankle in her cousin's mind.

There were sore hearts in Brentland that night after the lights were out, and quiet had settled once more upon that part of the world. The moon looking down from her high home in the blue sky saw a man struggling with a love which was taking fast hold on his heart, and for one whom he was led to believe by his cousin Sara was not worthy the love of any true man. She looked down on Sara fighting her battle with spite, hatred, and her own better nature, and on Vinnie, kneeling at her window praying for strength to put this love from her heart. It could never end well—she so much older, she told herself. And so her earnest prayers went up to the quiet heavens, and the moon shone down softly upon the bowed head of the girl who asked in such fervent words for calmness to remember, or for courage to forget.

Next morning, when the family assembled in the breakfast-room, there was no sign on any of their faces of the previous night's struggle. All looked merry and brighter for their dissipation, and Stuart smiled round on them all as he entered last of all; and later on, when Vinnie had dismissed school he came to the sitting-room, where the girls were busy discussing the merits and demerits of their horses, and asked would they like a ride?

Lucy looked up in pleased surprise. Stuart had never asked her first to come for a ride, since he fancied himself in love with a young lady who was visiting them. She had been obliged to ride then whether she wished it or not, for politeness sake. Was he in love again? and with whom? If it was Vinnie she should like that, but oh! surely not with Sara!

While these thoughts flashed through her mind, Sara had risen and Vinnie also—Sara, with a half-pleased, half-annoyed expression on her face—Vinnie wondering if she should refuse to join a party of which Stuart made one.

"Oh, how jolly!" exclaimed Lucy, jumping up and settling the question for Vinnie. "Come along, Miss Graydon, we must be quick; our men-folk are impatient cattle."

Vinnie flashed her a look which plainly said, "I have learned that," and then she caught Stuart's eyes watching her. A bright flush rose to her cheeks as she turned away, and she could have cried with vexation. What would he think of her, blushing because he just looked at her?

Her manner was almost cold when she joined the others at the rear of the house where Stuart was waiting with the horses; but he did not appear to notice this as he went to work, as he termed mounting them on their horses.

"Are you quite comfortable?" he asked, looking straight up into the lovely face of Vinnie Graydon, his dark eyes full of something that looked too much like love for her to meet them calmly, so she pretended to be fastening her glove as she returned,—

"Yes, quite."

Sara curled her lip, and muttered something about a "new chum;" but she had no cause during that ride to sneer, for Vinnie had always been reckoned a good rider when she visited her rich uncles at home, who kept

thoroughbreds in their stables, and she received many compliments from Lucy.

They all started in a row, but when the road grew narrow, only allowing two horses abreast, Stuart put his hand on Vinnie's bridle and led her beside himself, saying, as if in apology,—

"You do not understand our roads, and Fencer sometimes stumbles. Do you see that open space there!" he added, after a short pause, pointing with his whip to a clearing of about a mile in length and a quarter wide, "what do you say to a canter when we reach there?"

"I should like it above all things," she returned, with animation, her spirits rising with the natural buoyancy of youth with the exercise.

The scenery, too, was novel; all round them a vast swamp, with tall gums rearing their heads up to the sky, bread-fruit trees with their long grass-like leaves and scarlet fruit, and the gaudy-coloured birds fitting to and fro above their heads, uttering strange, harsh cries that floated round and seemed to die away among the mountains, that were to be seen in the distance, apparently encircling them.

"Oh! that was splendid!" exclaimed Vinnie and Lucy in a breath, as they drew up sharply, a great blue gum lying before them on the long slush grass, preventing their continuing. They were all abreast once more, and Sara could have dashed her fist in Vinnie's face for the loveliness which she saw there, and which had taken Stuart from her, as she chose to tell herself, though he would have been dumfounded had any one hinted at such a thing as his ever-loving Sara Bently.

She was his cousin, and he could talk to her as he would with his own sister, and Sara had grown to think this was showing her a preference, because when lady visitors came he always kept out of the way. Poor Sara! Perhaps she was to be pitied for her ugly face and manners, and it was her nature to be mean and malicious; but it was hard for those who came under her displeasure or clashed with her desires.

"What did you do about that—you know?" asked Sara, with a meaning glance at Vinnie, as they were returning, and Stuart and Lucy unconsciously listened to the girl's reply, wondering what Sara was alluding to.

"Oh, I sent him about his business, poor fellow! he did look so crestfallen," was the lightly spoken retort, accompanied by a clear, ringing laugh of amusement. "I said 'no,' emphatically."

"That was unkind," said Sara. "I feel sorry for him."

Vinnie looked at the sallow, sharp-featured face in some surprise. People must earn their living assuredly, but it did not seem to her a matter of such very great importance to the agent that she had not insured her life; he would get plenty of others, and she did not feel quite sure of the stability of the company.

Stuart looked very grave during the rest of the way back, and Lucy had a puzzled expression on her pretty, fair face; and Vinnie, feeling the change in their manner, though not guessing its cause, told herself, with a choking sensation in her throat, that she must never forget that, after all, she was only the governess, and that she must be careful not to infringe too much on the kindness she received at their hands.

Stuart assisted them to alight, holding his head high and not, deigning to glance at poor Vinnie, who felt as though she would like to jump into the earth instead of on it.

"Who is the poor fellow, Miss Graydon?" asked Lucy, as they walked to the house.

"Don't you know? the insurance agent came again to-day on purpose to see me. Fancy riding twelve miles!" said Vinnie. "I was really sorry for him, but Miss Bently sneers so when one is serious."

"Oh, I made sure it was a proposal," cried Lucy. "I have been weaving such a romance,

and it was only about that stupid thing," and both girls laughed merrily.

Sara, who had gone on in advance, was standing on the verandah with a pile of letters in her hands.

"Three for you, Miss Graydon, all in masculine caligraphy. I know this one, poor victim," holding up an English letter; then with a laugh,—

"Oh dear, I am afraid

Too many lovers will puzzle a maid."

"Not lovers at all, Miss Bently," cried Vinnie brightly. It was next to seeing her dear ones to hold in her hands the paper that had been pressed by their's, and read the words dictated by their loving hearts.

"One is from my brother, one from my cousin, another from my fellow-passenger from home."

"Don't be ashamed to own up. If you want to have a flirt here, Stuart won't spoil the game by telling, will you?"

And Vinnie turned to see Stuart standing a few paces from her, his handsome face disfigured by that awful scowl, his dark eyes glowing with anger.

Did he believe Sara? And had the thought of her being a flirt power to move him to such anger? Why was it that Sara always managed to say something to set them apart just as they were becoming friends? It never entered her mind that it was taught but accidental; but she longed—oh! so fervently—for the day to come when Sara would leave Brentland for her home in Ballarat.

"I have a horror of flirting, and think it as great a crime as a woman or man can commit. Flirts are not worthy the name of man or woman."

Vinnie's face was very pale, and the hazel eyes grew dark with feeling, while the soft, clear voice trembled slightly.

"High-flown trash. One would think I had called her a thief," cried Sara, biting her lips as she gazed savagely after the slender figure in its perfectly-fitting habit.

"She spoke the truth, whatever she does or thinks," returned Stuart, his face clearing a little. "Flirting is a despicable practice which no woman of delicacy, or who had a spark of modesty, would pursue."

"You need not speak so solemnly. No one for whom you care is a flirt; and now I am going to read my letters," and Sara fluttered away with a coquettish wave of the hand.

"I don't know so much about that, my cousin, if I am to believe all you tell me," muttered Stuart, as he dived his hands deep into his pockets and strolled away.

CHAPTER IV.

"Alas! how easily things go wrong,
A sigh too much, or a kiss too long,
There comes a mist and a blinding rain
And the world is never the same again."

"What do you say to a row? It is a lovely evening, just cool enough for the exercise to do us good."

Lucy and Vinnie, who had become fast friends by this time—for it was six months since she arrived at Brentland—were standing on the verandah watching Stuart and some other young fellows playing cricket on the green at the back of the kitchen.

They had just finished dinner, and the sun was setting over the dark mountains to their right in splendour known only in the tropics. Crimson lights trembled among the luxuriant foliage of the scrub on the river-bank, shafts of rich gold lay across the land, covered in tall, thick grass, amethyst and purple shadows crept in among the bushes and up the rugged hills, while the moon rose slowly like a golden ball in a sea of tender pink.

"Yes, I should like it! We are getting out of practice," Lucy and Vinnie shared the labour of rowing their visitors across, and she was now alluding to the fact that they had had none for some time.

"Come along, then; we will ask the mater to honour us."

Mrs. Hamilton, who was always ready to join in any little thing that helped to keep dullness away from the girls, went at once to put on her bonnet, and in a few seconds the little party set off.

Vinnie was in high spirits, though she had that day received almost an insult from Stuart, who stared her coolly in the face when she bade him good-morning.

But she had schooled herself to be bright and merry before others, and so she laughed and danced and sang as blithely as though a sweetness had not gone from her life that could only come back by doing what she felt would be a wrong.

"I was really ashamed of my son's behaviour this morning, Miss Graydon," observed Mrs. Hamilton, falling behind the other, and Vinnie followed suit.

"Do not mind that, Mrs. Hamilton, I had forgotten it," returned Vinnie, quietly.

"But I do mind, and so I wish you never to take the slightest notice of him in future; never hand him anything at the table, never appear to see that he is in the room," said Mrs. Hamilton, and Vinnie inclined her head in silence.

They had arrived at the river-bank by this time, where the boat lay moored to a tea-tree, whose scarlet tassels hung far over the quiet water. The red glow was deepening in the west, and throwing its reflection on the river, and bright, silvery fish were leaping out of the water, rejoicing at the delicious cool after the heat of the day.

It took some time to settle the party to their satisfaction, but at last they started, Lucy and Vinnie rowing, which was no small task, seeing that there were rocks in all directions. But mid many a laugh and teasing remark from Mrs. Hamilton they proceeded.

They had gone about a quarter of a-mile when a voice from the bank hailed them, and, looking round, they beheld Stuart, his face all smiles, standing under a big fig-tree.

"Won't you take a fellow in?" he called out, as they rested on their oars. "I have been walking along trying to attract your attention for I don't know how long."

"You may come with pleasure!" said Lucy, "but you will have to row. We are not going to encourage you in your laziness," and they headed the boat towards the bank.

"Do you think I would trust myself to your care?" he laughed, as he jumped in. "Now then, mater, you shall have a row."

"Your rudeness does not trouble me," said Lucy. "I must apologise for him, but I hope he will improve with time, ladies."

There was a general laugh at Lucy's words, and Mrs. Hamilton making some remark about the beauty of the evening, they all joined in conversation. That was an evening to be remembered—one of the happiest that Vinnie had or would ever spend at Brentland, and more than one looked back to it in the after years with sad and bitter memory.

The crimsoned river, the banks with their luxuriance of foliage and tall slender palms, with purple lights upon them, and the two lovely girls forming such a pretty contrast, all were engraved on Stuart's mind to come back in moments of solitude, and mock him with the thought of what might have been but for his own mad folly.

"I think we had better return now, Stuart," observed Mrs. Hamilton. "The dew is falling, and I cannot let the young ladies risk a cold, though it is lovely enough to tempt us."

"Oh, dear! how soon pleasures are over?" sighed Lucy.

"These pleasures could come very often if all were anxious to make each others' happiness," said Mrs. Hamilton, casting a meaning glance at Stuart, who looked as though he were going to resent the speech for a moment; but just then Lucy made some saucy remark about his "lady love," and he turned to answer with a smile.

"An old bird is not to be caught twice," he said.

"Have you really been in love, Mr. Stuart?" asked Vinnie, looking up at him. "I should have imagined you would deem it too frivolous!"

"Where does she live, Stuart?" said Lucy, looking mischievously at Vinnie. Mrs. Hamilton and Sara were walking behind with the two children; and though Sara would have given her ears to know what they were talking of, she could not in common decency leave her aunt. But every laugh that floated back to her, every downward glance of Stuart's, every upward one of Vinnie's, were like so many stabs to her heart, and her face was ashen, and her lips rigid with hate and fear of Vinnie.

"My lady-love lives—perhaps she lives here!"

He answered Lucy, but his eyes sought Vinnie's, and there was a meaning in them impossible to misunderstand. Lucy felt that there was more than casualty in his words and tone, and looked from one to the other in silence.

"I see some one standing at the gate!" cried Sara, delighted at having an excuse for joining them. "It is—who is it, Lucy?"

Lucy flushed, trying to keep back the look of shy pleasure from her blue eyes, but the dimples would show themselves in spite of her. Roy Allerton was a general favourite, for his own sake as well as for Lucy's, with the Hamilton family, and well he deserved to be. Tall and dark, with crisp, curly hair, frank brown eyes, a good-tempered mouth which was half-concealed by a small moustache, he was a handsome specimen of manhood; and when he spoke in that clear, manly, hearty voice, one felt at once where his charm lay—in his utter self-forgetfulness.

"You did not say you were coming to-night, Roy?" said Stuart, as they shook hands.

"No; I was not sure that I could give myself the holiday, so I left it as a surprise," he laughed, looking down quietly at Lucy, who doubtless saw in his eyes what he kept from his countenance, for she coloured slightly.

They all sauntered about the grounds for a little while, conversation flowing freely and generally, as it always did where Roy Allerton was one of the party. The two children had run away by themselves unnoticed by their elders, and Vinnie was just enjoying to the full Roy's description of how he felt when he first arrived in the colony, when a piercing shriek rent the air.

"It is Myra!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamilton. "That naughty Alfred is teasing her. Miss Graydon, please go and see what is the matter."

But Vinnie was already in the schoolroom from whence the shriek had preceded. Little Myra was lying face downward on the sofa, sobbing as if her childish heart was broken, and Alfred stood near the door, a scowl, which reminded her of his elder brother, on his face, albeit he appeared a trifle ashamed.

"What is the matter?" asked Vinnie, looking from one to the other. Alfred did not reply, but Myra lifted a flushed tearstained face from the sofa cushion on hearing the governess's voice.

"Oh! M-m-Miss Gray-Graydon, he-e called me a-a-a scorpion," she sobbed. "I'm not a-a-a scorpion, am I?"

"Hush, hush, dear!" said Vinnie soothingly, feeling as though she must laugh. "Now tell me all about it. Why did he call you a scorpion?"

"Look here, Miss Graydon, it's all very well of you to listen to her because she is a girl, but it is not fair," interrupted Alfred. "She is always trying to get me into rows with you."

"I'm not. You are a bad, wicked boy to say so. I never told Miss Graydon that you said she was a nasty, ugly, old thing to keep you in school yesterday," cried Myra, her tears drying with her indignation.

"You've told her now anyhow, and I hate you," said Alfred, passionately.

"Children, if you give way to such tempers in my presence I shall punish you in school hours," said Vinnie, quietly, but very firmly, and the children hung their heads. "Now, why did you quarrel?"

"Well, you know those dolls you bought us! I wanted them for twins, and dressed them both like the other, like as if they were real twins, and Alfred went and undressed them and made them into not twins."

"Yes, and then she said that she would tell papa, because she was his pet, and he would beat me, and I called her a scorpion, and so she is!" cried Alfred, excitedly, clenching his little fists and stamping his feet; "and I tell you what, Miss English girl, if you dare to punish me I will run away from home, and never—never come back."

"Alfred, you are forgetting yourself," said Vinnie, gravely, rising, and taking a hand of each.

"He says I am a demon, Miss Graydon," said Myra, as she led them out on to the verandah. "Oh! where are you taking us?"

"To your mamma. I think it right that she should be made acquainted with your wicked conduct," Vinnie answered very solemnly, keeping back her desire to laugh.

"Let the little beggars go. They won't be any better for a jawing," said a voice at her elbow, and she turned quickly to see Stuart standing behind her. The children were not slow to avail themselves of her confusion which caused her to drop their hands, and when she turned half coldly away she saw them scampering over the lawn.

"I think a lecture and a punishment would do them both a deal of good," replied Vinnie.

"Scoldings never did me any good, or punishments either," he said, with a laugh.

"No! I think you did not get enough. You would be much nicer now if you had had a few real thrashings when you were little," answered Vinnie, wondering at her own audacity.

"Do you think me 'nice' at all?" he asked, taking her hands, and looking down at her with passionate love-lit eyes. The hazel eyes, soft with love, were lifted for one moment in shy wonder to his face, and then the little hands were wrenched from his grasp, and Stuart stood alone gazing after the flying figure with a tender, loving smile on his lips.

At dinner Stuart sought vainly for a glance from Vinnie, but she had placed the epergne so that it completely shielded her from view, and so he had the pleasure of seeing the small white hands fluttering to and fro, and an occasional view of the top of her head as she bent to drink her tea, but nothing more.

She could not avoid him in the evening, and it seemed to give him great satisfaction to see the shy eyes droop beneath his own, and the hands tremble as he turned the pages of music, and when she gave him her hand at bedtime he held it for one moment in a warm, loving clasp.

Bedtime, as they called it at Brentland, was the hour at which, when they were alone, the family retired to their own rooms. Sometimes the girls would assemble together and have a chat, turn out their trinket-boxes, ribbons, laces, and compare notes at times, even donning each others' clothes; but to-night there were letters to prepare, the next day being mail-day, so they retired to their own rooms when they left the dining and sitting-rooms.

All the rooms in the house opened on to the verandah, and the three girls paused a moment at Lucy's door to bid good-night to Vinnie.

"I think we shall have rain to-night; the cockroaches are flying very gaily about, and there was no dew this morning," said Lucy, looking up at the dark sky, where, away to the South, the Southern Cross was gleaming brightly, among a thousand bright stars.

"Yes, and that means no sleep. Well, never mind; our tanks are getting wofully empty, so I will be glad;" and with a laugh

Vinnie waved her hand and passed round the side of the house.

After drawing the mosquito curtains tightly round the bed and setting the window wide open, Vinnie sat down and commenced her letters.

She had been writing about half-an-hour when a vivid flash of lightning struck in through the window, followed by a heavy downpour of rain—not rain such as she had been accustomed to hear in England, but as though someone were throwing it in bucketsful. Vinnie always felt as if the house must break beneath such a weight.

But she was growing a little more used to it now; and so, after the first pause, she went on with her labours, unheeding the frightful din made by the fall of the rain on the tinned-iron roof, and the croaking of thousands of frogs in all keys and voices.

Suddenly her light began to flicker, and, looking up, Vinnie saw Stuart standing in the doorway. She had not fastened the latch, as she always slept with it open, and so he had pushed it softly without attracting her notice.

Vinnie was not a girl to cry out even when greatly and suddenly frightened; and now, though her limbs trembled so that she could scarcely stand, she only turned very white and advanced towards him. Such an intrusion seemed to her a deadly insult, but she loved him and would not call the others.

He never moved from the open doorway, but stood there gazing upon her with passionate, loving eyes, and his face was very pale too.

Then, when she drew near, he put out his arms and clasped her tightly to him, holding her as though he would never let her go from him again, kissing her with tender passion.

"Darling!" he whispered, huskily, "do you love me?"

Vinnie lifted her eyes to his face, but a strong gust of wind swept through the room and they were left in darkness. She could feel the strong beats of his heart and the quick, irregular heaving of his chest, and pushing him from her she gasped rather than said,—

"How could you, Stuart! Seek me openly, or not at all;" and then she felt that she was alone.

The rain was now falling with a slow pitter-patter, and the dull rumble of thunder in the distance told of a coming storm, and Vinnie felt glad.

Lighting her candle she closed the window and door and sat down once more, a strange mixture of emotions rushing and sweeping over her, and causing a perfect chaos in her mind; as the whirlwind sweeps and swirls all that comes in its way, first here, then there, mixing all up in a strange confusion.

The storm outside raged long and loud, but it seemed to Vinnie that it was only part of her own feelings; and when she rose and the last dull rumble of thunder died away in the distance, she was calmer, having written till she could scarcely see the paper.

She was conscious that her letters were somewhat incoherent, but she had done her best; and when she got into bed at last she fell asleep quickly from sheer weariness.

The bright sunshine was streaming into her room through the opening between the walls and the roof when Vinnie awoke next morning, and for a moment, as she commenced dressing, she felt that the events of the previous night had been a dream.

Then there came the remembrance of his kisses—Stuart's kisses—and the thrill of wild joy that had swept over her at his touch, and Vinnie knew she had not dreamed that!

No, it was all a reality; but what was she to do? Must she leave Brentland at once and so put an end to it all? or dare she accept the love of the man who had won all that she had to bestow on mortal?

What would the world say? Would it condemn her? Was it a just requital to Mrs. Hamilton who had been so kind to her?

Vinnie sat down on her bed, white and exhausted with her self-communings, and still no nearer a satisfactory conclusion as to how he should act.

But she had her duties to fulfil; not for such as her were idle hours wherein to brood and, perhaps, in the continual wear, think away some of the pain.

She must be up and doing; the day's work could not be stopped because she was heart-weary and troubled-tossed. She had left her home and come out to Australia against the wish of all her friends, and must fight the battle alone and single-handed. And who could tell! Stuart loved her! All might yet be well.

With this thought in her mind she rose and passed out of her room, her fair face very pale, but sweet with the light of promised happiness upon it. She had finished her task of arranging the table, and was just opening the doors of the sitting-room when Stuart's footsteps sounded in the passage. And then he paused, looking for one moment into the hazel eyes raised timidly to his, with a world of passion in his own, while a half-tender smile hovered round his lips.

There was no time for words, others were about now; but Vinnie leant against the wall, sheltered by the draperies of the doorway, and nearly fainting with the strong, heavy beating of her heart.

He loved her! There was no mistaking that glance, it was one of real love. Oh! might she take the cup of happiness held out so temptingly and drink deep, deep? Oh, surely, yes! It could not be wrong if both loved!

CHAPTER V.

"Break, break, break

At the foot of thy crags, oh, sea!

But the tender grace of a day that is dead

Will never come back to me."

A week had passed away, and Vinnie stood at her bedroom window, weary and heavy-eyed, and with the look of one who has bidden good-bye to all of life's sweetness upon her young face.

The air was laden with the rich perfume of coffee bloom, and the girl was dimly conscious of thinking that the smell of coffee blossoms would always hold sad memories for her.

"What can it mean? Was he only playing with me?" she muttered through her white lips, clasping her hands nervously. "Oh, heaven! keep me from thinking over it, or I shall go mad!"

It was a bitter, sad voice that uttered those words, a voice whose tones had lost all their old, clear, ringing carelessness, and the lovely hazel eyes had a shadow in them which would never be lifted in this world; for Stuart had, by his behaviour after the night of the storm, proved himself that most despicable of all things in a man—a flirt.

On the evening of the following day Vinnie had played and sang as usual, the love she felt for one of her listeners giving a new tenderness to her voice, which charmed Mrs. Hamilton.

That was the last night they heard Vinnie Graydon sing so; for when good-nights were being said, and she held out her hand to Stuart, he glanced coolly down at her, and then passed out of the room without a word.

She did not see Sara Bently's cruel eyes fixed gloatingly upon her poor, pale face; she was not conscious that anyone had noticed the insult, but if ever woman's heart broke, Vinnie Graydon's did when she glanced shyly, lovingly up at the man who had sought her love and met the gaze of a pair of cold, scornful eyes, and felt the sneer that hovered about the mouth that had been pressed passionately to her own only twenty short hours before. Ah! too surely is it

"For women the calm and the pain."

All in silence, with a white face, but perfectly composed manner, Vinnie went through the other good-nights. It was as well she did

not see Mrs. Hamilton's shocked face, or she might have given way; as it was, she went swiftly but quietly to her room, where, kneeling by her bedside, she sought counsel of the only One whom she dared to appeal to in this most bitter sorrow.

So the days passed on, and she and Stuart met as strangers meet, without one glance, with apparently no knowledge of the other's presence, even when the family were assembled in the sitting room of an evening and Vinnie played as was her custom.

She had never sang since that night, pleading a cold when requested to do so, and her white face and quiet manner made Mrs. Hamilton fear that the cold would end seriously.

While Vinnie stood at her window, thinking over the events of the past week, and planning how she could leave Brentland in amity with the family, but without explaining her reasons, a voice called her name, softly, but as if the owner were hurried.

"Yes, Lucy"—it had come to be Lucy and Vinnie now—"I am here."

"I was afraid you were not, and I wanted to speak to you alone before I went. Vinnie, dear, Sara is my cousin; but, oh! if you value mamma's friendship, if you do not wish great mischief to happen, beware of her. She will turn your words so that you will scarcely recognise them, and yet you will not be able to deny them."

"Lucy!"

"Do not look so shocked, dear. Keep out of her way. I have seen all, and I know she has in some way prejudiced Stuart against you. Perhaps it will all come right," looking half-wistfully at the pained, weary face of the girl whom she had grown to love.

"No, Lucy, never! He is proud, and so am I," returned Vinnie, quietly. "It will never come right between me and him. I feel it, and I have made up my mind to leave Brentland."

"Leave Brentland! Oh, Vinnie!"

"Yes, dear. I am only mortal, and perhaps a very foolish one, for it is killing me to see Stuart every day and never to speak to him—to hear his laugh, and listen to his voice, and feel that I shall be insulted if I even lift my eyes to his face. You see, I am telling you my secret, Lucy. I know it is safe with you."

A low sob from Lucy was the only verbal answer, but she put out her arms, and drew Vinnie to herself, holding her as if she could not let her go. Sara's sharp, strong voice roused them, and, bending for another kiss, Lucy whispered,—

"This may be good-bye, then? Heaven bless you, dear, and grant you peace in the future!—peace and happiness," and with a wave of the hand Lucy passed out of the room, her long eyelashes wet with tears.

Lucy was going away to Victoria to spend a few months with her lover's people before her marriage, and with her she took the last ray of light out of Vinnie Graydon's sad, lonely life. Stuart's manner became ruder, and more rude as the time passed on; and at last Vinnie felt that Mrs. Hamilton could only feel pleasure at her departure from Brentland.

"You have heard me speak of Mr. —," she said, as she and Mrs. Hamilton were walking in the grounds one evening. "Well, he has written to tell me of a situation in Roma, and he thinks it would do me good to have a change. I feel he is right, and if you would not deem me un—"

"I shall be happy to let you go. Stuart's conduct has hurt me more than I have cared to own, and you are certainly looking very pale and ill. The change will do you good. When would you like to go?"

Mrs. Hamilton's manner was that of a kind and loving mother who is anxious to send a loved child from unpleasant surroundings even at the expense of her own feelings, and Vinnie could scarcely refrain from falling on her bosom, and telling the whole tale of her love and humiliation.

"I should like to go next week," she said, in a low, tremulous voice.

"Then that is settled. Perhaps in a few months you will return to us, and we shall all be happy together," and Mrs. Hamilton sighed.

She was too unselfish to speak of her own sorrow at losing Vinnie, and the inconvenience it would put her to. In her simple, pure-hearted way she felt that she *must* do all she could for Vinnie's happiness, because her son had behaved unkindly. Ah! how few Mrs. Hamiltons there are in our big, toiling world!

Mrs. Hamilton would allow no school. These last days must be ones of pleasure, she said, and so they were spent in boating, walks, and picnics in the scrub. About a quarter of a mile up the river there was a great fig tree, with immense roots sticking out of the soft, rich ground that afforded seats for them all, and here they would bring their books and dinner, and pass away the hottest hours of the day beneath its shade.

On the day before her departure Vinnie was sitting here reading aloud in her soft, sympathetic voice, when, after one paragraph on the heroic ideas, Mrs. Hamilton interrupted with,—

"Do you agree with the author, Vinnie?"

Vinnie put the book down, holding the leaves with one hand so that the place would not be lost, while she answered. She did not see a tall figure clad in white nanken standing behind a clump of young palms, nor the passionate dark eyes of the man as he gazed upon the little group of figures sitting under the wild fig tree. She did not know that every word she uttered in that sad, sweet voice was heard clearly by Stuart Hamilton. But Sara Bently did, and her eyes grew pale with hatred at the thought that Stuart should still gaze so at Vinnie Graydon, even though the girl knew it not.

"Yes, Mrs. Hamilton, I think that in Heaven's own time the mistakes of this world will be cleared in this world."

"Then there is no such thing as a life-long parting according to your theory, Vinnie?"

"I did not say so. The explanation may come too late for the fulfilment of happiness in this world. But do not you think it is well to know that when we meet above it will be in perfect understanding and love, with no faults and mistakes of this world to mar the beauty of that greeting?"

"Miss Graydon, what odd notions you have!" exclaimed Sara, in a harsh, grating tone, and rising as she spoke. To herself she muttered, "If I do not keep them apart my plotting will have been in vain—all my lies no good, for I saw repentance in his face what that little fool was ranting about this world and the world above. Oh! I hate you, Vinnie Graydon! I hate the sight of your lovely face—hate the sound of your soft voice!"

Her eyes met Vinnie's at this moment, and Vinnie recoiled as if she had been bitten by a snake. Lucy was right. That one glance revealed all the bitter, cruel hatred of Sara Bently's mean soul, and Vinnie told herself that it was well for her that the day of departure was so near.

"I like your idea, Vinnie," said Mrs. Hamilton, as she, too, rose. "It is a pretty one, and it seems a just one, when we remember at whose ordering these things come about."

Sara felt this to be a reproof, and made no more sneering remarks about Vinnie's "notions," as she termed any sentiment with which her shallow soul had no sympathy.

"Miss Graydon, I saw Stuart over there just now. May I go and fetch him?" said Myra, suddenly.

"No, dear. He is going for a walk, and would not like to be bothered," returned Vinnie, quietly, but she flushed at the child's words.

Why had he followed them?

"Oh, but he looked as if he wanted to come, Miss Graydon. You know, he is sorry you are

going away; he told me so, and I heard him tell Sara that he—"

"Myra!" cried Sara's sharp voice, startlingly sharp now with suppressed anger in it, "take care where you tread, and don't chatter—a black snake wriggled right across your path then."

Vinnie felt instinctively that Sara had stopped little Myra from saying something which she did not wish repeated, and do what she would she could not get those words, "he told me so," out of her mind. After dinner they all lingered about the garden, each seeming loth to begin the evening which was to be Vinnie's last at Brentland.

The evening itself gave ample excuse for such lingering. A dark, clear sky, dotted with millions of stars which shone like lesser moons above their heads; to the left the moon herself, rising slowly above the tall palms and bamboos, and shedding a flood of rich, steely light upon the wide stretches of land all under sugar, and to their right the deep, red after-glow of the sunset over the dark, rugged mountains.

Countless fireflies darted hither and thither among the cactus bushes, and the grass was bright with the tiny illumined insects. The faint rustle of the cane could be heard in the stillness as now and again a soft wind swept up from the broad Pacific, carrying on its wing a faint odour of the sea, mingled with the perfumes of wild ginger, orange blossoms, and oleanders.

It was nine o'clock before they went indoors, and then it was reluctantly. Stuart seemed restless and ill at ease, and his eyes sought Vinnie's many times during the course of conversation, but she did not see this, for never once did she glance in his direction. He sang too—sang for her, but she would not let herself think that it was so; he had been amusing himself at her expense, and she, like an idiot, had been in earnest. Contrary to his custom of late Stuart lingered until the whole party separated for the night, then he passed out on to the verandah, where Vinnie found him waiting.

"Good-night, Miss Graydon," he said, holding out his hand. His voice was soft and tender, and the clasp of his hand spoke more than a thousand words; but Vinnie's pride was roused, and though she trembled at his touch, and could have thrown herself on his breast and sobbed out all her bitter sorrow, she looked up calmly, saying in a cold, still voice,—

"Good-night, Mr. Stuart."

"I can scarcely believe you are really going, Vinnie."

It was Mrs. Hamilton who spoke, and there were tears in both eyes and voice.

They were standing on the verandah, Vinnie diligently buttoning her gloves and striving to appear calm, but making a miserable failure of it.

Stuart and Sara had gone for a ride before breakfast and had not yet come home, so Vinnie would be saved the pain of bidding him good-bye, yet with strange inconsistency, now that he was not here, she longed for only one more glance at the loved face, one more clasp of the hand whose touch stirred her soul to its very depths.

Her face was whiter as marble, with no more of life in it than a stone face, save that the pale lips moved and the dark lashes quivered now and again.

"And it seems like a dream, an 'uncanny' one, too, as the Scotch have it," replied Vinnie. Then they stood in perfect silence for some time, regarding one another ever and anon.

"It is very rude of Sara to go off in this manner," observed Mrs. Hamilton, glad of an excuse to appear angry so as to hide her emotion, "very rude of them both, but worse in Sara."

"Do not mind, Mrs. Hamilton, it is best so," returned Vinnie, and something in the girl's eyes—the deep, passionate anguish and

the pride which she saw struggling there—told the mother more than a host of words. She bent forward quickly and pressed a gentle, loving kiss on the girl's lips.

"You had better go before they return, dear," she said. "I will come with you to the boat. Come, children!"

When they reached the bank, where a black boy stood ready to row her over, little Myra and Alfred set up a perfect yell, clinging to Vinnie, and begging of her to come back soon—in a week—and nothing would pacify them save a promise of a speedy return.

Ah! little did any of them guess what fruit her return to Brentland would bear; better for her, perhaps, if she never had, yet who can tell?

Vinnie had a dim vision of waving handkerchiefs when she arrived on the opposite bank, and looked down with tear-blurred eyes; then the trap started to bear her away from Brentland and all she loved.

As they turned a bend in the road Vinnie saw Stuart and Sara riding along one of the sugar paddocks at the rear of Brentland. They were both talking earnestly, Sara in evident good spirits from her gestures.

Could Vinnie have heard their conversation her heart would not have felt so heavy as it did as the tall sugar-canes hid the two equestrians from view.

"Sara, it is too bad of you; there is Miss Graydon driving away, and you said she did not start until the afternoon," said Stuart, as he caught sight of the trap.

"Did I? Well, I was not sure, and I wanted to see Miss Henry so much before she left. Miss Graydon has nothing to do with you, Stuart; she is your brother's and sister's governess. It does not matter."

There was a harsh grating in her voice that she could not hide, mingled, too, with a tone of triumph; and Stuart's brow grew black with anger as he looked at her, and listened to her slighting words of Vinnie.

Was Sara jealous of Vinnie? It flashed upon him for the first time, and his voice was not pleasant as he said,—

"It matters a great deal. My mother's guests and those whom she has about her deserve some respect. Heaven knows I am poor enough, but you would have me a perfect Goth."

"Really, Stuart, I am sorry if you are hurt, but at the same time I am glad she has gone. There has been no true peace in the house since her arrival."

"There might be two opinions about the cause," muttered her cousin, as he swung himself from the saddle, and Sara gave him a quick, searching glance; but his face gave no clue to his meaning, and so she went into the house only half satisfied with her morning's work.

It is evening in Brisbane, and a girl and a man are standing on the verandah of a house that overlooks the pretty, picturesque river, flooded now with rich purple and golden lights, that are changing quickly to a deep crimson that will linger in the sky, and away over the range long after the moon is riding in her silver car.

Vinnie—for it is she—turns her face so that the golden light falls across it as her companion makes some remark; and to those who have known her before there is a sad, though sweet change in the young face. A calm, quiet lies like a veil over the pale face, and a strange, indefinable shadow is for ever in the hazel eyes—a something in the whole manner of the girl that tells of a hard battle with self, and of final conquest and resignation.

The situation which her friend wrote of proved too hard, but they had been kind people who had sent her, with high recommendations, to Brisbane, friends of their own, and here she had found a home as companion to an old lady who was too poor to afford a servant as well, and too feeble to do things for herself—a dear, lovable old lady, who

during the six months of Vinnie's stay with her had grown to look upon her as a daughter.

Mrs. Grafton saw with mingled pleasure and pain the deep, abiding passion that Arnold Norant had conceived for his lovely fellow-passenger from England—pleasure, for she thought the love of a good and honest-hearted man would make Vinnie happy and rouse her from the quiet that was unnatural in one so young—pain, that she would lose one who had endeared herself to the old lady, but the pain she would not think of.

And so, when Arnold Norant called on this calmly beautiful evening, Mrs. Grafton sent him out on to the verandah, giving him a smile as she said that "Vinnie was there," which told him his desire was understood, and that he had her sympathies.

Arnold Norant was young, but not in his first youth; there were lines about the pleasant firm mouth that only come with years of toiling in the busy, greedy world, and a gravity in his manner that told of a hard fight.

He had conquered, and now at thirty-four could offer his bride a home where wealth would buy all earthly ease, and a heart that had never beaten for woman before. He was a man of strong passions, a man who if he once loved would love for ever; and it was Vinnie Graydon, whose heart was buried in the grave of a dead love, who had awakened passion in the breast of Arnold Norant.

As Arnold bends towards her Vinnie meets his eyes, and she knows before he speaks what he is about to say. Like a flash come question and answer in her busy brain while he is yet hesitating.

Her own love is hopeless. This man is good and true and earnest, and without vanity. She feels that if she refuses him his life will be a blank which no other woman's smiles will ever lighten. Shall she, who cannot obtain the happiness she craves, withhold it from another?

No, she tells herself. Arnold Norant shall never know that she does not love him as fervently as he loves her; and she lifts her face to him, the purple and golden mists falling around her like a veil, and waits for him to speak.

"Vinnie," he says, and his voice is like his face, deep and earnest, with a lurking tenderness in it that is pleasant to hear. "Vinnie, I think you must have seen how dear you have become to me. I have dared to think that I am not distasteful to you, and that knowing I cared you have not repulsed me. Is it so?"

"It is so," replied the girl, her eyes drooping under his tender gaze, while a flush mantled her pale cheeks.

"You knew I cared, and you let me come?" he asked.

"Yes," Very lowly came that one word; then Arnold bent his chestnut head and laid a tender, almost reverential, kiss upon her lips, while his blue eyes sought her downcast hazel ones.

"Darling, Heaven has been good to me! I pray I may be worthy!" he whispered, and Vinnie echoed those last words for herself.

Perhaps in time, with this good man's love to shield her from the world and harm, she would learn to forget Stuart, and love her husband even as he loved her.

So she reasoned with herself, though a voice in her heart whispered softly, "True love never dies. You gave all your love to Stuart Hamilton, and cannot take it back!"

"I have written to Vinnie, and received an answer. She says she will come with pleasure."

Sara Bently looked up quickly from her croul-work as Mrs. Hamilton laid down the letter, a malicious smile upon her lips.

"I always thought the English were so proud?" she said. "But I suppose Vinnie Graydon is the exception that proves the rule."

"You speak enigmatically, Sara! How do you mean?" interrogated her aunt.

"Well, if I knew, as Vinnie does, that my presence was distasteful to certain members of a family, I would die rather than visit them!" was the half-defiant retort, for Sara well knew her words would vex her aunt.

"Of whom are you speaking, Sara?" asked Stuart, who was reading under the candelabra at the further end of the room. "To whom was Miss Graydon's presence distasteful?"

There was a challenge in his eyes, a scorn in his voice, that sent an indescribable thrill of fear through Sara Bently's heart.

What did he mean? Had he discovered her falsehood? Surely he would tax her with it at once if it were so.

Ah! Sara Bently, retribution is fast coming! That weary, unsatisfied expression on your face tells that deceit has not brought content nor the fulfilment of your desires, and soon your punishment will be complete!

"I am speaking of yourself, Stuart. You took no pains to hide your dislike," returned Sara, her voice sounding very shrill in her excitement.

"For the future you will be kind enough to allow me to speak for myself," he said, closing his book, and turning to Lucy, who had just entered with her lover. "Are you going to give us some music?" he asked.

Sara bit her lips, and took up a fan to hide her face.

To do her justice, she loved Stuart with all the passion she was capable of bestowing upon anyone, and a sickening, overwhelming pain fell upon her as she realised that Stuart would never look upon her with eyes of love, though he might not wed Vinnie Graydon.

She rose, after a time, and left the apartment. Lucy was singing "Once Again," and she could not bear the music or words in her present frame of mind.

What if this visit of Vinnie's awoke the old love in Stuart's heart? Oh! why must Lucy want to get married just now?

Could she not in some way prevent Vinnie coming?

So she sat in her room, with no light save that given by a ray of moonlight that fell across the floor, plotting and scheming; but when she heard them all bidding good-night on the verandah she rose from her chair, passing her hand wearily across her forehead, for she knew that Vinnie must come, that she was powerless, and could only wait for the course of events.

"He is mine by the right of the love I have given him all my life!" she muttered, fiercely. "Surely Heaven would not let her take him from me?"

Heaven? Sara Bently, did you think of Heaven when you breathed into Stuart's ears the lie that separated him from Vinnie Graydon?

She did not go out to bid them good-night, for her face was not under her control, Sara Bently being possessed of a crafty soul, but with no strength of will to hide its workings.

She watched Lucy and Roy Allerton as they stood on the verandah, talking earnestly, after the others had departed, and a wicked feeling of hate and envy entered her soul that Lucy, her cousin, should have her every heart's desire, while from her was withheld this one happiness.

"I am glad now that she is to be married soon," she muttered, "I should grow to hate her if I saw her and her lover together day after day looking so calmly and confidently happy!"

Brentland is lying bathed in hot northern sunshine, the tall palm's green plumage is perfectly motionless, and not a quiver is to be seen among the feathery foliage of the bamboos.

A deathlike stillness reigns in the house, for those who are at home are all lying down, exhausted with the heat, not only of this day, but of the last month, for it is nearing December, and the sun seems to shine down in merciless gloating upon the land which has no shade.

Stuart Hamilton is the only living creature to be seen, and he is lying on a bamboo lounge, with his arms above his head, apparently asleep.

The quiet is broken by the loud barking of dogs, and while he is half-sleepily wondering who they are barking at a light step sounds on the verandah, and a tall girlish figure, in a prune-coloured habit, comes round the corner of the house, and face to face with him.

"Vinnie!" he cries, starting forward, his face lighting up with joy.

But Vinnie has schooled herself for this meeting, and looks up with a calm hauteur on her face that chills him, as she says, coldly, but pleasantly,—

"Mr. Stuart! You are not often at home at this hour. Is there anyone else at home?"

"Yes, the girls are in their room," he answers, gravely, letting her hand fall, and turning away, in utter disappointment, yet half glad that she had not noticed his evident delight at seeing her.

Vinnie has no need to ask if anyone is at home again, for before she has traversed half the length of the verandah Mrs. Hamilton, the children and Lucy, are gathered round her, laughing and questioning all in one breath.

"Come along, you are just in time for afternoon tea," says Mrs. Hamilton. "Now," as they entered the sitting-room, "how come you to be here? I thought the Maranoa was not due until to-morrow, and we were all going in to meet you."

"Shan't we go now, mamma?" asks Myra, opening her big dark eyes in disappointment and looking as though about to cry.

"Vinnie is here," she returns, smiling, and not noticing the signs of the coming storm.

But Vinnie knows them by past experience, and draws both children to her as she says, with a grave smile,—

"You have lost nothing. The heat is terrible on the road, and I saw one horse fall down in a dying state, and passed another dead on my way here. Not pleasant sights, dear! We will have a picnic in the scrub or down on the rocks by the rapids instead, eh?"

Myra looked at Alfred to see if this met with his approval, and as the expression of his face was pleasant she smiled up at Vinnie.

"Are you happy, Miss Graydon?" she asked, suddenly, and Vinnie started and flushed at the abruptness of the question.

"What a question! What made you think of it?"

"Mamma says unselfish people are always happy, and I heard her tell papa you were the most unselfish girl she had ever seen," replied little Myra.

"Yes, I am happy," answered Vinnie; and Mrs. Hamilton, catching the sadness in her voice, told herself that she would not wish her child to look and speak so.

Sara came into the room while they were drinking tea, greeting Vinnie with the utmost frankness, and laughing, in her usual half-sarcastic manner, over the loss of their promised trip into town.

The wedding was to take place in the following week, and so they were all very busy during those days before. Being so far from town there was no possibility of buying confections, and so all had to be made at home save the wedding-cake.

Vinnie, having chosen her path, did not spend her days in pining, and, though there was that new quiet in her manner, she laughed with and at the others over their work in the kitchen, and told many a quaint, pleasant story while kneading up flour and butter for pies and tarts.

And so the wedding-day arrived—a hot, dry day, the sun shining down with a blinding glare, and rendering the house like an oven. The flowers which had been placed to decorate the table, whereon the luncheon was arranged in most elegant and picturesque style, were already drooping their heads, and when the wedding party were all assembled the clergyman came to Mrs. Hamilton with a request

that the ceremony be performed in the open air, under the orange trees.

It was a pretty sight. The young bride in her robes of Indian muslin and Breton lace, and her stalwart lover, grave-faced and tender by her side; Vinnie, in pale pink and white lace, holding her bouquet and gloves, and the group of guests forming a half circle round them. Sara had refused to be a bridesmaid, and stood far away from them by Stuart's side, but he had no eyes for her; they were fixed on Vinnie Graydon.

Once only did she look up, when the clergyman's voice pronounced the words, "I, Lucy, take thee, Roy &c.," and her eyes met Stuart's, but she made no sign. She had given her troth to Arnold Norant for good and aye, and dared not let herself even think of Stuart Hamilton now. The benediction had been pronounced, Lucy and Roy Allerton are man and wife. The luncheon and speeches were tolerably successful, but the heat was so great that everyone looked relieved when the hostess rose and passed out on to the verandah, using her fan vigorously.

But, despite fatigue and heat, when the bride has bidden good-bye to all, and is seated in Roy Allerton's pretty trap, looking very fair and winsome in a dress of pale cream with purple trimmings, and a hat to match, there is great excitement and running to and fro, dipping of hands into mysterious little baskets held by the ladies, and then the young couple drive away amid a shower of rice and slippers, and bright, merry laughter.

CHAPTER VI.

"Dead, long dead,
Long dead,
And my heart is a handful of dust."

"MR. NORANT! That is the friend who came from England with you?" Mrs. Hamilton spoke interrogatively, holding the letter which Vinnie had given her still in her hand. "You are true to your friends, Vinnie," with a smile.

They are standing under a large, spreading banian alone, and Vinnie lifts her eyes, not seeking to hide the pain in them from her companion.

"We are engaged to be married," she said, with a smile that was so full of weariness that to Mrs. Hamilton it seemed more sad than tears.

"Do you love him, Vinnie?" asked her friend, laying her hand gently on the other's shoulder.

"He loves me, and I will be true to him," returned the girl, with a sob in her voice, though her eyes were dry. "It would spoil his life if he thought I did not love him, and life is not so very long. Oh! I pray mine may not be!"

And with these words she turned away, putting up her hands to her face as she went. Mrs. Hamilton did not recall her, she felt that in such a moment as that the girl was best alone. A rustling of leaves behind her made her turn quickly to see Stuart, white and trembling, standing near the fence that enclosed the garden.

By his side stood Lucy and Roy Allerton, both very pale, and Lucy's face showed signs of tears. Mrs. Hamilton stared at them aghast for a few moments, then she asked naturally,—

"What has happened?"

"Come up to the house, mother," cried Stuart, in a savage tone of voice, and striding forward; "come up to the house, and face Sara Bently, with her wicked false tongue."

Mrs. Hamilton looked at Lucy and Roy as if she thought her son had taken leave of his senses, but Roy came close to her side, saying gravely,—

"Stuart has cause for anger against his cousin; she has played him false in a most cruel manner."

Vinnie and Sara were standing under a mango tree talking quietly, when Stuart strode angrily up to them, followed by his mother,

Lucy and her husband. Vinnie drew back in pained surprise as she caught sight of Stuart's face; but Sara quailed and flushed, and turned as if about to flee from him.

"No, miss mischief-maker, you shall stay and confess your falsehood," hissed her cousin, taking her by the arm. "Turn round and face Vinnie Graydon while I put a few questions to you."

"Are you mad, Stuart?" she cried out, shrilly, struggling to free herself.

"Very nearly. Why did you tell me that black lie? Why did you say that Vinnie told you how I sought her love, going to her room when the others were safe in theirs, when you listened at the door like the mean pitiful thing you are, listened and watched, letting no word or look escape your wicked eyes. Tell me why did you do it? Did Vinnie say any of those things you repeated to me? Did she tell you of any words of love that passed between us at all, or did you listen each time, coming to me afterwards and saying how Vinnie had laughed over it with you? Speak the truth, Sara; Roy Allerton saw you crouching under Vinnie's window that night, and accidentally mentioned it to me, and then the whole truth flashed upon me, for he went on to say how he had seen you listening at the door, when Vinnie and I were alone, often."

Stuart paused for want of breath, holding his cousin's arm still in that vicelike grip, but she seemed to have no cognisance of it. Her face was livid, and her thin lips moved, but no sound came from them for some moments; then she lifted her eyes to his, and even in his anger a thrill of pity swept over him for the unhappy girl, her eyes were full of bitter humiliation and pain.

"They were all lies, Stuart; Vinnie loved you from the first, but I swore she should never be yours if I could not win your love. I told myself she should not win you, and I kept my vow." There was a kind of dogged defiance in her manner, but all there felt nothing save pity for her, her humiliation was so complete.

"Go," said Stuart, coldly and sternly, "and may Heaven pardon you. I never wish to look upon your face again."

"Stuart!" she almost screamed, flinging herself on his arm. "Oh, Stuart, forgive me, I love you too!" but he put her from him, turning to where Vinnie had been standing, but she was nowhere to be seen.

"Where did she go, mother?" he asked, looking wistfully at Mrs. Hamilton, who had grown very pale during the scene with her niece and son.

"She went down towards the river," she said, pointing towards the bank that led to the rapids, and Stuart went without a word. He found Vinnie standing by the river bank under the shade of some tea trees, whose scarlet tassels rested lovingly on her bronze head, her face very still and white, her small hands clasped before her.

As the sound of footsteps fell upon her ear she turned and looked with pained, dazed eyes into Stuart's face.

"Vinnie," he cried, putting out his hands to her, his voice thrilled with tender longing and sorrow, "I heard what you said to my mother under the banian tree this afternoon. Oh, darling! tell me, can you marry this Arnold Norant, knowing that you are dearer than life itself to me?"

"Your love has come too late," said Vinnie, with a quiet in her tones that betrayed the constraint she put upon herself. "I have given my pledged word to a man who deserves a better fate than to wed a woman whose heart is buried in the grave of a hopeless love, but, please Heaven, he shall never know."

"Vinnie, Vinnie! you do not love me or you could not wed another, even for honour's sake," he cried, passionately.

"Yes I do, Heaven help me! But listen, you are young—you will learn to forget—you will grow to love some other woman with a stronger love than you feel for me. But Arnold

Norant has passed his first youth; if I were to be false to my word it would ruin his life!"

"And you?" asked Stuart, huskily. She looked up suddenly at him, and instead of answering, repeated a few words from a poem which he had read one day:—

"I think the love denied me here,
Will be mine in the rest of God."

He never forgot the look in her eyes as she half whispered those words—the calm, brave resignation, struggling with her woman's love, that showed in every line of her countenance—never forgot the sweet, pure face of Vinnie Graydon as it looked when she lifted her lips, saying softly,—

"Kiss me once, Stuart, for the sake of what might have been," and he stooped and kissed her with the stern, passionate despair of a last farewell. Little did either dream that it was, indeed, the last. Little did Stuart dream as he strode away, crushing through the scrub, that when he again gazed on that lovely and loved face there would be no recognition, no pain, only calm, sweet repose, only a sweet, holy smile on the lips that had spoken so softly and tenderly to him.

In the sad after-days it came back to him with a grim, sorrowful satisfaction that he had spoken no words of anger to the woman he loved, in her bitter anguish. Once or twice they had trembled on his lips, but he felt that Vinnie was acting rightly, and so, as he took that farewell caress, he whispered hoarsely,—
"Heaven bless you my love—and Heaven help me!"

The sun was low down in the heavens and sending shafts of glorious colour over the land, when Mrs. Hamilton met Stuart on the verandah. His eyes were heavy and dark with pain, his face white and rigid, and her mother-hear, knew without word from him that Vinnie Graydon had sacrificed Love to Honour. She did not blame the girl, but there was a little bitterness in her voice when she spoke.

"Where did you leave her, Stuart?" she asked.

"Has she not returned? I left her two hours ago, down by the rapids," he answered, in husky tones.

A startled look came to Mrs. Hamilton's eyes. The blacks had been troublesome of late, and there were a number of paid-off boys waiting the arrival of a schooner to take them back to their islands, who spent their time wandering on the river bank.

"I cannot understand it," she said, hurriedly. "Something must have kept her."

Once more Stuart goes down the bank in search of Vinnie, this time with no passionate, eager longing, only a dull sickening sense of loss is upon him.

It is a lovely evening, with purple and golden mists rising up among the polished foliage of the tropical vines, crimson lights mingling with the frothing waters as they dashed with a dull musical roar over the rapids.

Golden shadows are lying across the land too, and, under the tree where he had left her, he sees Vinnie, not standing as he had last seen her, with hands clasped in silent prayer and sorrow laden-eyes, but lying in a pool of sunlight that plays fitfully among her bronze hair and over her still, white face.

There is a holy calm on it, a calm that is not of this world, and Stuart knows, ere he lifts her reverently and sees the crimson stain on her breast, that Vinnie Graydon is gone to her everlasting rest. He knows instinctively how it happened; some black has been shooting birds in the scrub and the arrow has entered Vinnie's heart instead.

He utters one deep agonised groan, presses one kiss on the unconscious lips smiling so peacefully, then carries her gently back to the house, and lays her in the room which was always called hers.

Search was made for the author of her death, but he or she was never found.

Late that night, Stuart wandering moodily in the grounds, sees a white figure coming to—

wards him and recognises Sara. He half turns away, but her voice, with a gentleness in it quite new to him, makes him pause.

"Stuart," she says, humbly, "forgive me. I would give five years of my life to restore her's, even if it would take you from me. I am going home to-morrow; forgive me!"

"I forgive you," he returns, putting his hand on her shoulder. "But let this be a lesson to you, Sara. My life is ruined. I can never love again, shall never be the same again. The best part of me lies buried in that grave which holds Vinnie. Now leave me and good-bye."

And Sara goes, leaving him pacing slowly to and fro in the moonlight, that shows his handsome young face haggard and worn as with years of trouble. Now and again he turns his eyes towards a piece of rising ground on which is a rough wooden cross. It is Vinnie's grave, and once he stretches out his arms, and a great sob bursts from him as his pale lips murmur,—

"Oh, Heaven! how can I live without her!"

Then he grows calmer, the moon moves slowly on her way, and the darkness which precedes the dawn falls upon the earth. Stuart pauses and looks up at the heavens, and whispers,—

"Darling, if you can look down from your new home you shall see that I am a better, truer man, for the memory of you and the hope of meeting you and claiming you in 'The Rest of God.'"

[THE END.]

FACETIE.

It is quite appropriate that the villain of the opera should always be the bass man among the singers.

"Why does that old man wear a wig, I wonder?" said an English girl to her Cockney beau, who thoughtfully responded: "He probably wears it to make him vigorous."

"Yes," said Miss Penn, "I rejected Mr. Hogg. Nice fellow, but I couldn't have the announcement of my marriage appear in the papers under the headline of Hogg-Penn."

A DESPAIRING SWAIN, in a fit of desperation, recently declared to his unrelenting lady-love that it was his firm determination to drown himself, or perish in the attempt.

SAID A VERY OLD MAN: "Some folks are always complaining about the weather, but I am thankful when I wake up in the morning and find any weather at all."

A LADY and gentleman accidentally touched each other's feet under the table. "Secret telegraphy," said she. "Communion of soles," said he.

"May I aspire to your hand?" asked a masher of a witty belle, who instantly replied: "You may have the refusal of it, sir, for an indefinite period."

ACT: "Has anyone been at these preserves?" Dead silence. "Have you touched them, Jimmy?" Jimmy (with the utmost deliberation): "Pa never lows me to talk at dinner."

"My dear," said a mother, annoyed at some incautious remarks of her little girl, "why can't you keep a secret?" "Because," said little Mischief, demurely, "two of my front teeth are gone, mamma."

THE LATEST DODGE.—"Maria," he said to his wife the other evening after supper, "I think I'll put on that light overcoat to go the club." "What, that bottle-green?" "Yes, dear." "Why, I sold that to a pedlar a whole month ago." "Sold it! sold that bottle-green overcoat to a pedlar!" "Yes, darling, for that pair of vases." "Then we are ruined! In one of the pockets of that coat was ten pounds—all the cash I had in the world. No new dresses—no nothing for you and the children—we are ruined—ruined!"

LIFE is short—only four letters in it. Three-quarters of it is a "lie," and a half of it is an "if."

"MA," said Jennie Parvau, "what is the silver question there is so much fuss about?" "Oh," answered ma, "it's whether we shall use plated ware or real sold silver at the dinner parties."

THAT some boys at an early age appreciate the responsibilities of life is shown by the twelve-year-old who wrote in a composition: "Colonel Ellsworth was engaged to be married, and this was more solemn than his death."

"CAPTAIN," said a cheeky youth, "is there any danger of disturbing the magnetic current if I examine that compass too closely?" And the stern mariner, loving his little joke, promptly responded: "No, sir; brass has no effect whatever on them."

"Is the earth round or flat?" asked a member of a school committee of a candidate for a position as teacher. "Well," answered the candidate, "I'm not particular about that. Some likes it round, and some likes it flat, and some others likes it square. I teach it any way that suits."

HE continually played on the cornet. "Sweet Spirit, Hear My Prayer." The maiden lady next door sent word, with compliments, that she heard his prayer, and would pay a month's lodging for him in advance if he'd move to another part of the town.

LADY (at an intelligence office, about to engage a new servant): "Now, Bridget, in regard to going out visiting, I—" Bridget (interrupting): "O, mum, you kin go out whiniver ye please. You'll not find Bridget Lannigan hard, mum, nor dictatorial like!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Upperten, "the pastor is a very eloquent preacher, no doubt, but he sometimes irritates me by dwelling with such stress upon the fact that in the other world we shall wear white robes. White never did become me, even when I was a girl. My husband says I look regal in garnet silk. If I thought I would wear a robe of garnet silk the inducement to lead a religious life would be a great deal stronger than it is at present."

HIS EDUCATION.

"What is your name?" asked the young lady school teacher addressing a boy she had called up.

"Dave Black."

"Well, Davey, have you ever been to school very much?"

"None."

"Do you know your letters?"

"Yes."

"Can you spell?"

"Kain't spell cow, but I ken spell hoos."

"You must say horse, not hoos."

"That's what pap says."

"Well, he's wrong."

"Blame of he is."

"You must not say that."

"What must I say—Darned?"

"Gracious, no."

"Pap says it."

"Well, but you must not. Are you the only child at home?"

"None, I ain't at home."

"I mean are you the only one when you are at home?"

"Not of any the rest uv them air thar."

"You have brothers and sisters, then, I suppose?"

"Yas, got a brother an' a sister, but sister married Fool."

"Married whom?"

"Fool."

"Is that his name?"

"I reckon so, for I heard pap say that Sal had dun run erway with that fool."

"That will do. Go over there now and sit down, Davey."

"Tired sittin'; want to go out an' look round er little. Wall, er goo-by."

Davey's education was complete.

TOT was receiving his first lesson in geography: "What is that?" asks the professor, placing his finger upon the map. "That," answers Tot, "is a dirty finger-nail."

"PAPA, I guess there ain't any plumbers in heaven," said a six-year-old youngster one rainy day. "Why not, my son?" "Cause the sky seems to leak so easy."

"I WONDER, miss," said a customer at a pastry-cook's shop to the Hebe at the counter, "that the sight of so many delicacies does not inspire you with a desire to taste them." "You forget, sir," replied the young lady, chillingly, "that I see them made."

"AIN'T it time you paid me that five pound you owe me?" asked a farmer of his neighbour. "Taint due," was the reply. "But you promised to pay me when you got back from London." "Well, I hain't been there," he replied.

LITERARY MAN (laughing): "Yes, I took to literature naturally. I was vaccinated from a quill, you know." Friend (grimly): "The world would have been the gainer if you had been vaccinated from a pick or shovel."

TRAMP: "Will you please give me sixpence, sir? I'm on my way home to die." Gentleman (handing him the money): "I don't mind giving you sixpence for so worthy a purpose as that, but your breath smells terribly of whisky." "I know it does, sir. Whisky's what's killing me."

MRS. BREEZE: "I am so sorry, Delia, to hear that you have had trouble with your husband." Mrs. Geeze: "You have been misinformed, Amelia; merely a little disagreement. You know married people cannot always agree." Mrs. Broeze: "Can't they? Well, we always agree. In fact, I make it a point to see that we do agree; or, rather, that John agrees with me, which amounts to the same thing."

AMONG the stories of the high wind is one relating to a farmer who was on his way to market. As the old man jogged along against the wind he was greeted by a sympathising friend driving the other way: "It's a windy day for you to drive to market." "Yes," answered the farmer, as a gust of wind blew viciously in his face, "I hope the wind will turn round by the time I come back."

"WHAT makes you late to-night?" asked a wife of her husband. "You promised me you would be home at ten o'clock." "I've been (hic) lookin' at the comets," he replied. "Comets? There is but one comet visible to the naked eye." "Yesh, but one comet visible to er naked eye (hic); but yer see I had the aid of er powerful glass, and could see two of 'em."

FRIGHTENED TO DEATH.—"Charlie," said a Spartan mother, "you have disobeyed me twice to-day, and I must punish you." "Oh, mamma! please don't whip me!" "No, I'll not whip you," was the calm reply; "I'll punish you by making you remain in the parlour while your sister is taking her music-lesson." At this awful sentence the boy fell insensible to the floor. The autopsy revealed that death was caused by fright.

SHE WAS BONY.—John Henry, a masher, stood at the corner with one of his kind waiting for a girl to come along. At last a thin young woman from the rural districts came by. As she passed John Henry said something about her being bony, but he went after her, and catching up, he said, "Good-afternoon, miss." "Good-afternoon," she said, sizing him up as if she were going to put a price on him. "Ahem, miss, ahem! I ah—" He hesitated. "Well," she continued, coolly, "why don't you bark?" "Bark! bark! I don't quite understand?" he said, inquiringly. "Oh, you don't? Well, I might have known better than to have given you credit for so much intelligence; but in our country a puppy that has had any advantages of training always barks when it finds a bone." Since that date John Henry is a changed man.

SOCIETY.

THE PRINCESS OF WALES, on the occasion of the first meet of the Four-in-Hand Club, wore olive green silk and velvet, and a little bonnet of dull gold beads. The young Princesses had on the brown dresses they wore at the opening of Putney Bridge. It was a highly successful gathering.

The latter part of July and the whole of August is to be spent by the Court at Osborne. On dit that Princess Beatrice has set apart the last day of July for the opening ceremony of the exhibitions organised at Southampton by the Royal Southampton Historical Society and the Isle of Wight Bee Keepers' Association. Her Royal Highness, according to present arrangements, is to be accompanied by her husband.

The late State ball was a very grand affair. The Princess of Wales wore the very dress she had on at the last Drawing Room. The coiffure was surmounted by the Princess's well-known tiara of diamonds; while pearls and diamonds gleamed and glittered about her neck and on her bosom and arms. She looked as pretty as a picture—prettier than many pictures—and once more made it seem well-nigh incredible that she could be the mother of the girl at her elbow in white silk and tulle. Prince Albert Victor made one of the party from Marlborough House.

Princess Louise had on a green tulle dress, enriched with velvet, satin, and magnolias. Princess Christian wore white tulle, with bodice and tunic of white Sicilienne, and trimmings of pearls and marsh-mallow flowers; and the Duchess of Teck, in grey shaded velours frappé and satin duchesse, brought her pretty daughter, Princess Victoria, who was looking unusually charming in pale blue satin and tulle, with garniture of white lilac and foliage.

A very stylish wedding was celebrated recently at St. Peter's Church, Eaton-square. It was that of Captain W. Kenyon Mitford (8th Hussars), eldest son of Mr. W. Townley Mitford, of Pithill, Petworth, Surrey, with Cecily, daughter of Mr. William Slade, of Montys Court, Taunton. There were six bridesmaids, who wore dresses of cream muslin, trimmed with embroidery, and having large cream sashes, and small white tulle bonnets without strings, trimmed with white satin ribbon and bunches of shamrock. They had scarves of green and yellow striped silk, fastened on the shoulder with gold and diamond shamrock pins (the colours and badge of the 8th Hussars), the bridegroom's gift, and carried bouquets of narcissus, tied with ribbons to match their scarves, also the bridegroom's gift.

The bride was attired in white satin, the front of the dress being richly embroidered by hand; had a very narrow wreath of orange blossoms in the hair, a long tulle veil, and diamond ornaments. She was attended by a page.

The Countess of Rosebery's reception at the Foreign Office was the most brilliant gathering that has been held this season. The floral decorations were splendid, and the dresses worn by the ladies present were superb. The hostess looked well in a handsome white satin dress, trimmed with gold embroidery and ostrich feathers, and she wore diamond ornaments; the Duchess of Bedford and the Duchess of Manchester wore black; the Marchioness of Tavistock, gold and cream brocade; the Duchess of Leeds, black; Lady Harriett Godolphin Osborne, white satin, trimmed with lace and crystal; the Countess of Dalhousie, petticoat of white satin, trimmed with gold embroidery, and train and bodice of palest mauve satin; the Marchioness of Ormonde, white brocade; Countess Granville, mauve and white satin, and diamond tiara and other ornaments.

STATISTICS.

DURING the last year the output of coal in Great Britain was 159,351,418 tons, in which 520,632 colliers were engaged.

LARGEST GERMAN GUN.—The largest German gun has just been mounted on the fortifications at Wilhelmshaven. Its weight is 70 tons, length 33 feet, diameter of bore 14 inches, weight of charge nearly 3 hundredweight, weight of shell over 7 hundredweight. It is the largest gun ever turned out by Krupp.

INVENTIONS.—The number of inventions on electricity during 1885 was 1,353, or 5.78 per cent. of the whole number of inventions of all kinds. The number of the last patent, issued in 1885, was 333,493. Of these, about 265,672 are now in force.

GEMS.

THE omnipotence of love makes fools of wise men.

A violent passion has seldom brought two persons together without ultimately making both of them miserable.

An affected humility is more insufferable than downright pride. Take care that your virtues be genuine and unsophisticated.

The pleasantest things in the world are pleasant thoughts; and the greatest art in life is to have as many of them as possible.

KEEP ever in mind that the consequences of your actions cannot rest upon your head alone, but must reach away into the future, and taint and embitter the lives of the innocent.

WHAT a vast deal of time and ease that man gains who is not troubled with the spirit of impertinent curiosity about others; who lets his neighbour's behaviour and thoughts alone; who confines his inspection to himself, and cares chiefly for his own duty and conscience.

THE time was when men could learn and study good things, not envy those that had them. Even in the eyes of worldlings men were had in price for learning; now letters to your "business men" only make men vile. He is unbraidingly called a poet, as if it were a contemptuous nickname.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

NEW TINS should be set over the fire with boiling water in them for several hours before food is put into them.

ZINC.—To clean zinc dissolve two ounces of alum in one quart of vinegar, use as hot as you can, afterwards rubbing dry.

RUST.—To remove rust on steel make a paste of emery powder and kerosene; rub on and let stand a little while; then polish with oil.

KITCHEN TABLES may be made as white as snow if washed with soap and wood ashes. Floors look best scrubbed with cold water, soap, and wood ashes.

FOR BURNS.—Every one should keep a bottle ready of equal parts strong lime water and sweet oil, well shaken together, to use on burns and scalds, or for chapped hands.

REMOVAL OF WARTS.—A correspondent of the *Therapeutic Gazette* announces through its columns the virtues of castor oil in the removal of warts. Constantly applied for from two to four or six weeks each day—that is, once a day—it has not failed in my hands, says the writer, in any case of any size or long standing. The time it takes may try the patience of the users, but if faithfully used they will get their reward in the removal of the warts without leaving any scar. I have used it with some success in other growths, and had benefit enough to merit further trial. It might, he adds, be a success in the removal of certain kinds of cancer, especially scirrhus forms.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A CURE FOR HICCOUGHES.—A remedy which the writer has tested many times without a failure, is published in the "Popular Science Monthly," which says that it can always be used by some one else upon a person who has the hiccoughs, and generally by the sufferer himself. You say to your friend something like this:—"See how close together you can hold the tips of your fore-fingers without touching. Now keep your elbows out free from your sides. You can get your fingers closer than that. They are touching now. There—now hold them so. Steady!" By this time you can generally ask, "Now why don't you hiccough?" The involuntary tendency to breathe slowly and steadily when the attention is fixed on performing a delicate manipulation counteracts the convulsive action of the diaphragm.

"CRACKLE" GLASS.—This variety of glass, which has become so fashionable on account of its effective and cracked appearance, is produced by covering one side of a piece of plate-glass with a thick stratum of a flux or readily fusible glass, mixed with coarse fragments of glass. In this condition it is placed in a muffle or an open furnace, where it is strongly heated. As soon as the flux is melted, and the glass itself has become red hot, it is removed from the furnace, and rapidly cooled. The flux (or fusible glass) under this treatment cracks and splits, leaving innumerable lines of fracture over its surface, having much the appearance of scales or irregular crystals, which cross and intersect each other in every direction, producing very striking and beautiful effects when the light falls upon its surface.

DO HER JUSTICE.—The girl of to-day is a busy, useful worker. She is generally proficient in needlework. She can not only alter her own dresses, but cut and make those and her underclothing as well. She has a knack at trimming her hats and furbishing up her wardrobe, and does her full share at helping the dressmaker, who comes to assume charge of the spring and fall sewing. She understands the various branches of mending, and takes that division of labour off her mother's hands, as well as the care of parlours and dining-room, the arranging of flowers, the supervision of the manners and apparel of the younger children, and sometimes of their studies, too. Let full justice be done to the "girl of the period," or rather, let there be a clear comprehension of what should be really represented by that much-abused phrase. It is not fair to take the weakest specimens of the sex as types of a class comprising earnest workers, with strong conceptions of life, its responsibilities and burdens, and a steady purpose to bear them according to the best of their ability.

ENAMEL FOR TOILET USE.—Now that society women use all external aids at their command to increase their beauty, enamel is becoming popular again. It used to be that only the oldest and plainest used enamel upon their faces, and in such cases it but rarely extended below the neck. Now many young girls enamel, and with low-cut dresses they must, to carry out the illusion, enamel arms and bust, as well as their faces. A sort of enamel powder is used, which is rubbed on and polished until the flesh shows like polished wax. The illusion is well enough when a maiden has a fine form, or the arms and bust of a Venus de Medici; but when she is of the lean, scraggy variety, all angles and no curves, the effect is horrid. There are nine scraggy girls in society to one plump one, and perhaps if the men could have the matter put to the vote they would decide in favour of high-necked dresses and sleeves buttoned tight at the wrist. Fortunes are spent in paint and powder every season, and whoever had the income from rouge alone would have more than many a struggling professional man's yearly income.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

FANSTY AND PEARL.—We cannot insert the notices.

T. J. B.—Any good music publisher or musical instrument maker would inform you. We cannot give addresses.

MIFA.—Self-respect is the best instructor in a case like yours. It should require but little exertion of the will to dismiss such an object from your mind.

MARSHPOPHLEES.—The spoon should always be placed in the sugar when done with. The name means "noble town."

NELLY.—Her Majesty has had nine children, the Crown Princess of Germany, Prince of Wales, Duke of Edinburgh, Duke of Connaught, Duke of Albany, Princesses Alice, Louise, Helena, and Beatrice.

D. T.—It is generally supposed that Japan is making more rapid progress in the industrial arts, in science, and in the education of its people than any other Asiatic nation.

CANOLINE.—Births were first registered in 1837. Apply to the Registrar-General, Somerset House. More's is a very good grammar. Your letter is fairly worded, and you write neatly, but not fashionably.

TOM.—If you marry anybody else, the young lady will have a good cause of action against you for breach of promise. Hence you should proceed with great caution, and try to come to an understanding with her.

P. R. B.—A circle round the earth is very much larger than that of which a rainbow forms a part. The raindrops, the reflection from which forms the rainbow, are only a short distance from the earth.

H. H.—The name of Tartar was a synonym for a ferocious, crafty warrior, and so a man who found unexpectedly that a despised antagonist was too strong for him, was said to have caught a Tartar. There is an old military joke on the subject, but it has no foundation in fact.

M. L. L.—Black sealing wax is used by those in mourning. The use of other colours is purely a matter of preference. The Latin phrase quoted means, Diligence conquers all.

REX DARNLEY.—1. It might be serious; consult a respectable medical man. 2. Not possible. 3. It is a difficult study, and requires years of application. Mere personal appearance has very little to do with the matter.

T. C. C.—We think that it would be foolish to persist in a quarrel without any good cause, and if the gentleman desires a reconciliation we advise you to grant it. When he speaks answer him pleasantly. The hair enclosed is brown. You write very nicely.

G. W. W.—There is not the same advantage in learning a dead language like Latin by the conversational method; however, some books have been written on the conversation plan, such as *Sauveur's Talks with Caesar*.

E. S. T.—1. Keep the skin clean by the use of mild soap and plenty of water, take exercise in the open air, and eat only plain wholesome food in moderation. 2. Good opals are very valuable, but their value depends on their fire and brilliancy. A clear piece of opaline quartz, the size of a marble, would have little value.

D. D. W.—Yes, you can marry your step sister. She is no kin of yours whatever. She is the daughter of your father's second wife by a previous marriage, and there is nothing to prevent you from doing so if the young lady and your parents are willing to the marriage.

G. G. H.—Your idea is a good one. Perhaps the same result might be secured by those who have the opportunity of associating with Germans or Frenchmen by acquiring a little French or German, and using one of those languages in conversation until the impediment in the speech should disappear.

G. R. R.—The great storm, which is still remembered in Ireland, occurred in the early part of 1839. It was more severe in the North than elsewhere, but it extended over much of the island. The first great failure of the potato crop was in 1845. The distress continued to be very great for the three succeeding years.

E. H. D.—You seem to take this matter altogether too much to heart. It is, of course, foolish for people to pretend to have knowledge of any kind which they do not possess, or to be full of enthusiasm over matters which they do not understand. Still such people should not be "castigated," nor treated unkindly. They should simply be let alone.

C. H. F.—There is no infallible rule to make love come or go. The best treatment for yourself is to take an interest in books, study art, games, and especially in society, and this course is also the best to attract the average man. The girl who does everything and has plenty of girl friends is admired by most men, and admiration with men is the first step to love.

H. J.—You may send any advertisement you like through the post, provided it is not fraudulent or offensive to public morality and decency. We do not suppose it possible that you would wish to distribute any advertisements, of even a doubtful nature, but if you wish "to make assurance doubly sure," you can consult a respectable lawyer.

L. S. C.—1. A gun is "shot off" when it is loaded with a charge of shot over a cartridge. 2. An apprentice to the printing trade is required to serve until he is out of his time, according to his indentures, before he is paid a journeyman's wages. In some establishments the ap-

prentices are paid a stated weekly sum; in others they are paid two-thirds of the amount earned by setting type at piece-work prices. 3. In the selection of a trade or profession, a boy should consult his own tastes and inclinations, and also be guided by the advice of his parents or relations, who are better able to judge of his abilities than a total stranger.

W. W. A.—Try lemon juice in your bathing water, and drink a lemonade without sugar every morning before breakfast. The trouble lies, probably, in a disordered liver, and for this the lemonade is a specific. Leave off butter and rich food for awhile. The lock of hair enclosed is thick and fine, the colour a light golden-brown.

E. H. H.—1. Dynamite is finely pulverized silica, or silicious ashes, or infusorial earth (most frequently the last), saturated with about three times its weight of nitro-glycerine, and constituting a mass resembling damp flour. 2. When mixed with nitric and sulphuric acid, glycerine becomes, like dynamite, of which it forms a part, a terrible explosive compound.

L. R. P.—You ought to have more self-respect than to let a man who is nothing to you but a friend, embrace and kiss you, and you should be ashamed to admit that you have not enough strength of character to put a stop to conduct that is disagreeable to you. If any visitor insists on taking liberties of which you disapprove, leave the room at once, and let him find his own way out.

THE GOOD WIFE AND MOTHER.

Like a star in the sky,
Like a gem in a crown,
Is a good wife and mother
In city or town.

Her husband's companion;
His helpmeet through life;
In the storm and the sunshine,
The joy and the strife.

The two walk together
Through path and plain;
Or climb, hand still clasping,
O'er mountains of care.

While he may be plucking
The thorns from her way,
She is scattering the roses
To sweeten his day.

She hastes in the morning
Her children to meet,
As they come to her chamber
With patterling feet.

To these dear little children
Her sweetest words are said,
As they lift their red lips
For her fresh morning kiss.

And her heart is repaid—
That heart that has yearned
To love her darling—
By kisses returned.

Like the gold from the mine—
Like a pearl from the sea—
Is the good wife and mother,
Where'er she may be.

M. K.

ELLIE.—Your friends are probably too severe on the physician. His advice is doubtless honest and sincere. According to your statement, he warns you against the violent exercise that is taken in gymnastics. Perhaps if you should tell him what your friends say, and consult him about the gentle exercise which may be taken in a gymnasium, he would advise you to avail yourself of it.

T. C. D.—There is no safe and permanent method of removing hair from the arms. Of course the electric needle, which destroys each hair separately, could be used, but the expense and time required would be enormous, and there would be danger that the skin would be left rough and permanently disfigured. Depilatory ointments cannot be recommended; their effect is only temporary, and they contain powerful poisons.

R. D. D.—One of the earliest and most prolific sources of serfdom and slavery was war. In ancient times it was the custom for the victors to kill every enemy they could catch. The life of a conquered enemy belonged to the conqueror, and he could do as he pleased with it. After a time it began to be seen that it was better to sell a captive, or keep him for one's own service, than to kill him. The captives, of course, would rather have their lives spared on almost any terms rather than to be killed. This naturally led to the enslavement of prisoners of war; and as ancient nations were constantly engaged in warfare, the number of slaves or serfs soon became very great. There was no distinction of a lord as to slaves in those times; nor were the most distinguished and accomplished people exempt from servitude. A general, a poet, a philosopher, or any one who was taken captive in war was either killed or enslaved. Mechanics and skilful workmen of all kinds were highly prized as slaves. As time went on, the systems of slavery and serfdom became firmly rooted in all parts of the civilised world, and lasted for centuries. When the

reaction came, and the enslaved masses began to strive for freedom, great convulsions followed, and it took a long time for them to regain even a portion of their rights. Even when they became nominally free they were poor and almost powerless, and it took ages for them to force their way to a fair recognition of their merits.

L. L. B.—It was Sir Walter Scott who wrote:

"The moon is in her summer glow;
But hoarse and high the breezes blow,
And, racking o'er her face, the cloud
Varies the tincture of her brow."

The quotation will be found in *Rokeby*.

E. L. L.—You probably over-exerted yourself to cause the trouble to which you refer. With every breath air goes in and out of the lungs, but it is only a small quantity, for the lungs are not filled and emptied at each breath. The air breathed in goes only into the large branches of the windpipe, and does not go into air-cells at all. But they are all the time filled with air, which takes up the oxygen from the out air and gives off carbonic acid to it.

L. D.—An agnostic is one who does not think that we have anything certainly, in regard to God, the origin of the universe, man's place in it, or, in fact, in regard to any question which cannot be settled by direct or indirect experience. "Gnosticism" is commonly applied to certain heresies, in the early ages of Christianity, who tried to substitute "gnosis," or knowledge of mysteries, for Christian living and Christian faith. "Agnosticism" is the reverse of "gnosticism."

W. W. A.—An echo is the sound reflected or overheard to the ear. Simple echoes are familiar to all, but there are on record many remarkable cases which are not generally known. For instance, a writer in 1766 states that at the Belmonte palace, near Milan, there was an echo that repeated sixty times the sound of a pistol. Sir John Herschell quotes the case of an echo at Woodstock Park that repeats seventeen syllables in the daytime, and twenty at night.

P. C. H.—There are well authenticated instances which sustain the position of those who believe that the imagination has power to produce such illusions as you mention. Professor Bennett, of Edinburgh University, has left on record a case which is directly in point. A butcher, working in the Market of Edinburgh, was in the act of hanging a heavy piece of meat on a sharp hook, when his foot slipped, and he was caught by the arm and hung suspended in the greatest anguish. He was taken down and carried across to a chemist's shop on the opposite side of the street, where the case was at once attended to. The surgeon proceeded to cut open the sleeve of the man's coat, the sufferer crying out in great agony as this was done, yet, when the arm was exposed, it was found that the skin had not even been scratched. The hook had penetrated no farther than the coat.

R. S. J.—The observance of Easter can be traced back to the first century after Christ. The day was held in such great esteem by the early Christians, that they made it the beginning of the church year. Curiously enough this Christian festival comes about the same time as the Passover of the Jews, and the name Pasque or Pasch is often applied to the feast of the resurrection. Our title Easter is taken from the Saxon *Ostere*, to rise, or perhaps from *Ostera*, the name of the Saxon goddess who presided over the dawn and spring, a festival in whose honour was held at the time of the spring equinox. The principal dish of the old English Easter feast was a gammon of bacon, accompanied with eggs, *ad libitum*. But these eggs were also set upon the Jews' table with the Paschal lamb, and there is ample evidence that the early Christians observed Easter by eating roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and eggs. The egg, holding as it does life in what seems death, was held by the ancient Egyptians to be a mysterious emblem of the world, and also as a symbol of the resurrection of man after the deluge. The Jews, taking it as a token of their escape from Egyptian bondage and the Red Sea, ate it at the Passover, and it is claimed that the practice of colouring it originated with them. Red was anciently the favourite colour, symbolising the blood of the Saviour, but green and yellow were also used, and even in those early days gilding was applied to it. It was an old custom to carry them to the church to be blessed by the priest, this being the form of such blessing: "Bless, oh Lord, we beseech thee, this Thy creature of eggs, that it may become a wholesome sustenance to the faithful servants eating it in thankfulness to Thee, on account of the resurrection of our Lord!"

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